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Scott Slifka prepares to conclude mayoral tenure

See story on page 15

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"The Sounding Board probably would not be able to operate as an all-volunteer, non-profit arts presenting organization without partnering with churches." - *Jim Rigby*

See story page 8

ON THE COVER

Mayor Scott Slifka, pictured standing on the steps of Town Hall, will soon step down after years of service to his hometown.

Photo by Abigail Albair
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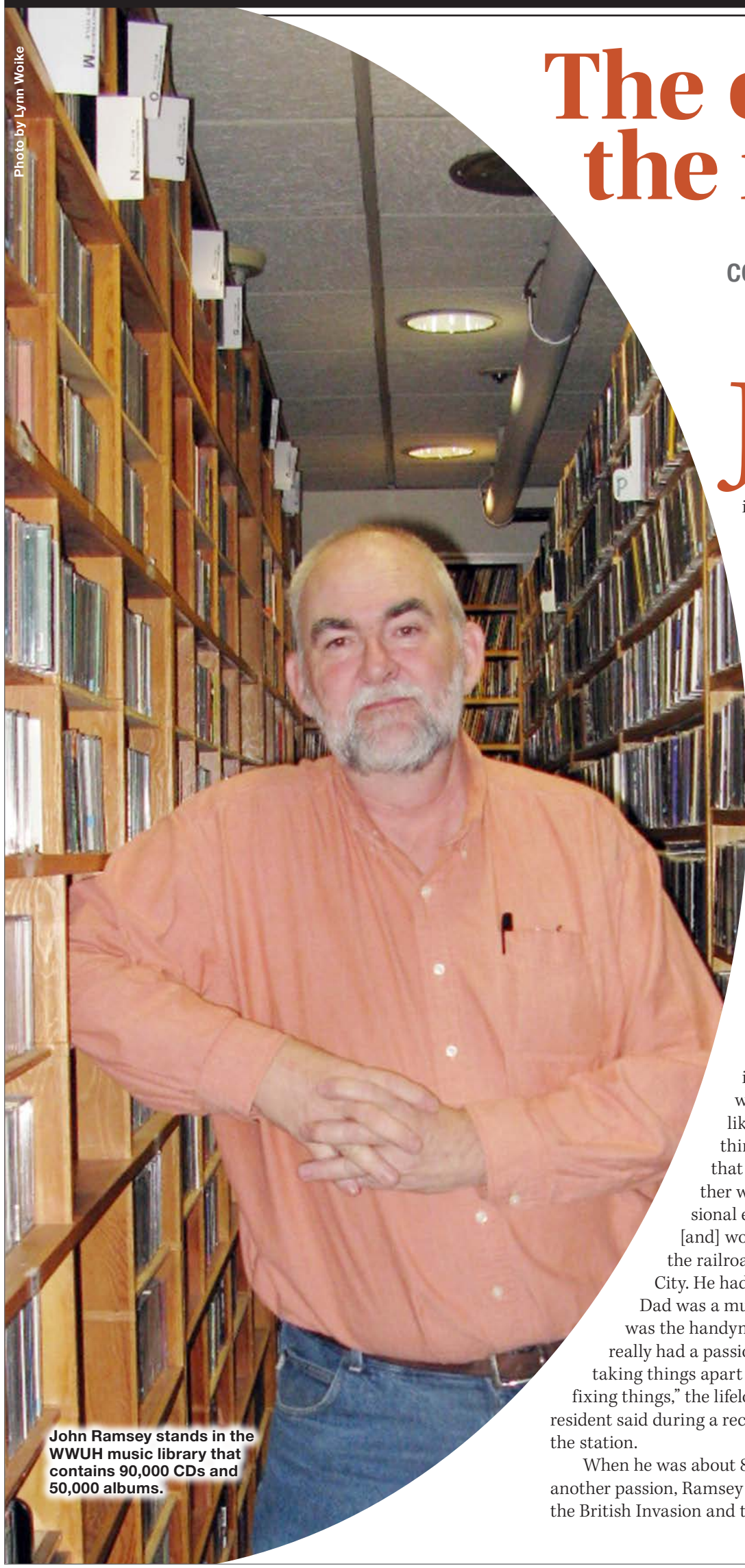
Photo by Lynn Woike

John Ramsey stands in the WWUH music library that contains 90,000 CDs and 50,000 albums.

The other side of the microphone

WWUH station manager John Ramsey is committed to alternative community radio

by Lynn Woike
Editor

John Ramsey has gone from a pre-computer age radio geek to one of the first inductees into the Broadcast Hall of Fame.

He is station manager of WWUH 91.3 FM at the University of Hartford and author of "Hartford Radio (Images of America)," which was prompted by material gathered for hartfordradiohistory.com, for which he is the webmaster.

He's making radio history himself.

"I was always technically inclined. When I was a little kid, I liked to tinker with things and I think I got that from my grandfather who was a professional engineer in Boston [and] worked on electrifying the railroads in New York City. He had his own company. Dad was a musician. My mom was the handyman in the house. I really had a passion for tinkering, for taking things apart and fixing things," the lifelong West Hartford resident said during a recent interview at the station.

When he was about 8, music became another passion, Ramsey said, crediting the British Invasion and the fact he came from a family of musicians.

"So I had a passion for music and the radio fascinated me. No only the music on the radio, but the DJs."

Together with his father, Ramsey built a little crystal radio. He put together a bigger kit with a loudspeaker by himself, surprising his father. From his basement he began his own radio shows.

Recalling a time before computers, he said, "When I was 14 ... I was just into technology and radios and ham radios and I think my parents really wondered what was going to become of me."

Learning about the new radio station at UHart, his father arranged for Ramsey to get a tour.

"It was the first time I'd seen the other side of the microphone. I'd been a listener of radio. I was fascinated by the equipment and by the people – that the voice never sounds like you think they look," Ramsey said.

In 1970, at age 15, he began volunteering at the station.

He's still there.

The college students humored him, he said. In an article he wrote for the station's 30th anniversary, Ramsey said that, due to his interest in electronics, "I was assigned to cleaning up the station's engineering shop, which was a small room in the basement piled to the ceiling with all sorts of wonderful (to me) parts and equipment."

In December 1970, someone in the programming office realized Ramsey had his FCC Third Class License and asked him to do a four-hour program Christmas Day. While he said he was flattered, he joked that he was probably the only warm body with a license stupid enough to volunteer on Christmas Day.

Ramsey did well and soon began doing fill-ins about once a week for the next year as he learned more about station operations. Then began a weekly midnight rock show. In those days, before YouTube and Pandora, he recalled, music and radio were both a large part of the youth culture.

Doing sound for bands on the road pulled him away from the station. He returned in

1973, getting on the air two shifts a week before his work with bands forced him to leave again, just as the station was going live 24 hours a day. In 1977 he returned for good.

"As much as I liked the music, being behind the microphone and talking on the air wasn't really my thing. I could do it. I was proficient at it. But it really wasn't my passion … engineering was, so the engineers that were here, the student engineers, took me under their wings and taught me a lot about engineering and in '78 I got my FCC 1st Class License."

Ramsey said he is "more or less self taught – with a lot of practical experience." He took classes at Ward College at night while working full time to pass the FCC test.

He volunteered as WWUH's station's chief engineer while working at commercial stations – first as the chief engineer at WCCC and then as chief engineer at WDRC.

When, in 1986, the growing WWUH sought to hire a professional engineer, Ramsey said, "I was lucky enough to get the job."

The mission then is the mission now: to serve as many different publics as possible – especially those who are underserved, bringing a voice to the voiceless.

With 1,000 watts – compared to WTIC's 50,000 watts – and a tower atop Avon Mountain, WWUH reaches about a million people from New Haven to Springfield, Massachusetts.

"I love radios stations that exist just to serve the listener and not to serve the advertiser. … This is a utopian dream for a nonprofit station manager."

–John Ramsey

Where most stations have one format – oldies, talk, rock – WWUH has a block format, much like television, with times for jazz, bluegrass, opera, rock, Celtic, talk, news and gospel.

For 11 years, until the host left town, the station had the only Native American radio program in the country. A gay and lesbian show has been running for 25 years. There's a waiting list of shows wanting to get on the air.

On the weekends listeners can tune into Lithuanian, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and West Indian programming.

"Like New England weather," Ramsey said, jokingly, "just wait a few hours and it will change."

All this gives back to the community the station serves, he stressed.

"In the old days," he said, "before the FCC deregulated everything, commercial stations used to release time on the air waves on Sunday to ethnic groups. So, a local Polish group would pay $100 for two hours and they'd sell their own ads. Well, that's all gone by the wayside."

An enthusiastic cheerleader for community radio, "live" is one of his two favorite words.

"We've had someone in the studio 24 hours a day, since 1974. We are one of only two stations in Hartford County that's live 24/7," he said, also noting, "We were the first radio station in the state to broadcast on the Internet back in 1997 and now streaming is very popular."

It means the station has listeners around the world, from Arizona to Australia and Japan to Jerusalem.

Ramsey's other favorite word is "local" and he is passionate about serving the population within the broadcast area.

"I love radios stations that exist just to serve the listener and not to serve the advertiser. … This is a utopian dream for a nonprofit station manager."

No marketplace concern means you can narrowcast and offer alternative programs for specific segments of the public, he said.

"We were public radio before public radio existed in Connecticut,"

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Photo by Lynn Woike

WWUH station manager John Ramsey has been involved with the station since he began volunteering when he was 15.

"It was the first time I'd seen the other side of the microphone. I'd been a listener of radio. I was fascinated by the equipment and by the people – that the voice never sounds like you think they look."

–John Ramsey

he said, and the station continues to offer "that which is not elsewhere on the dial."

"I don't think we have shows that don't have any listeners; we have shows that don't have affluent listeners and you shouldn't discriminate against them."

Although the U.S. is world famous for jazz, there are no commercial jazz stations, Ramsey said.

"Jazz only exists on the non-commercial band because it doesn't sell."

WWUH airs nine jazz shows a week for a total of 27 hours.

"Once you take the commercial pressure out of it, you can afford to do a narrowcasting and serve the public more than just entertaining them."

The station raises $100,000 from 2,000 listeners and the university contributes $9,000 plus in-kind services such as space, utilities and security. A concert series also raises money for the station.

"Some shows bring in $2,000 an hour. Others bring in nothing. Both shows are equally good, equally worthy. Both are serving underserved segments of society. One thing we would never ever do here is make decisions based on money," Ramsey said.

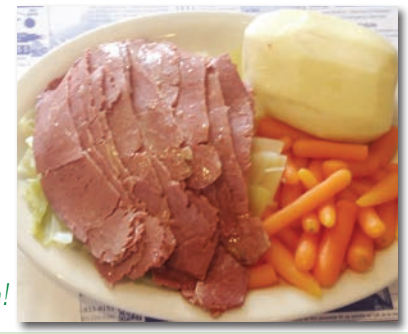
As general manager, Ramsey supervises the 69 volunteers on the air every week along with about 20 others who work behind the scenes. He is responsible for orientation and training, paperwork, keeping the website going and assuring that the station's library, with its 50,000 LPs and 90,000 CDs – representing more than a million songs – is kept in order.

"The joke is that I'm the camp counselor," he said.

Ramsey is also an informal advisor for WSAM, the student-run and student-funded radio station that is streamed online and has programming geared for just students.

He also takes care of the WCCC tower for the station that, two years ago, sold for $10 million to a California-based Christian group that owns 800 stations nationwide.

Back in 1997, he helped a Torrington dentist and philanthropist Dr. Isadore B. Temkin launch a small FM educational station, WAPJ.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"I love doing that," Ramsey said. "I put the station together for him and put it on the air and then I stayed on" offering his engineering services on a pro bono basis. Four years ago, Temkin wanted to give him the station, but because individuals cannot own educational stations, Ramsey helped start the Torrington Community Radio Foundation to run it instead.

"I'm the president of the board of the foundation, chief cook and bottle washer – as a volunteer. ... That's a labor of love," he said, describing the station as a miniature version of WWUH.

For 12 hours a day it does live shows from its storefront studio, and for 12 hours it rebroadcasts WWUH programming.

Two other stations – one in Somers and the other in Wallingford – also carry WWUH's signal when their programming ends for the day. Several area cable systems and cable public access stations also rebroadcast WWUH's signal at various times.

In 2000, Ramsey was hired to build the state's first low power FM station at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield – WACC. Last summer, he built one for the New Haven Independent, an online daily newspaper run by journalists, and last year, when the Simsbury Volunteer Fire Company launched its LPFM station, Ramsey helped them build it and was contracted to provide some training.

"I fit things in on the weekend or evenings," he said.

Mark Channon – station manager at WIHS in Middletown, operations director at WAPJ in Torrington and the host of Thursday Morning Jazz on WWUH – nominated Ramsey to be in the first class of the Connecticut Broadcaster's Association Hall of Fame.

Among the other 11 inducted last October were such household names as Denise D'Ascenzo, Arnold Dean, Gerry Brooks, Brad Davis and Al Terzi.

Praising Ramsey's skills, personal integrity and knowledge of broadcast engineering, Channon stated in the application that Ramsey "is highly sought after inside and outside of Connecticut. ... His creativity has advanced radio stations past roadblocks they've encountered."

He added, "John has been a mentor to numerous people, including me, who have advanced in radio. He is a kind, patient and wise teacher. ... I've often said that John seemingly is able to answer any question about radio. What's more, he can do so extensively while adding history about the topic at hand and illustrations."

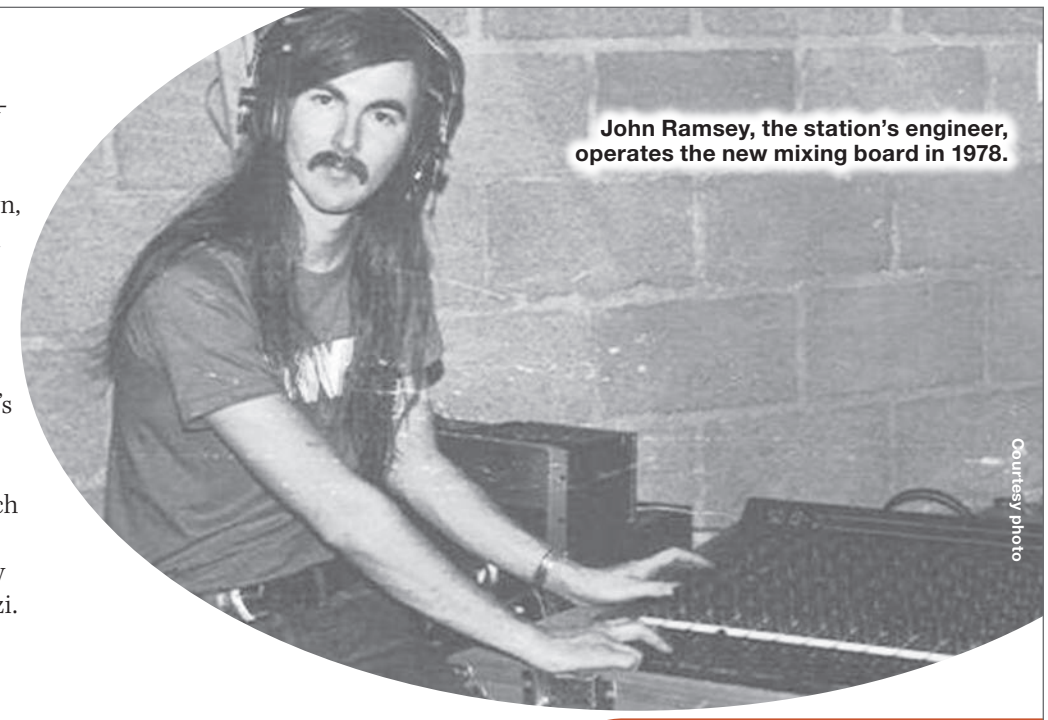
Ramsey's love of radio led him to create hartfordradiohistory.com, born out of research he did to teach a course on local radio history.

The site contains information about more than 100 stations and recently began adding material about television stations.

His desire to preserve Connecticut's broadcast history led to a book on the subject published in 2012 by Arcadia Press.

His other passion is the Cold War, for which he also maintains a website – coldwar-ct.com. It has stories and photographs spanning 40 years of the "Duck-and-Cover Generation" from Nike sites with nuclear missiles to underground bunkers to the state's defense industry.

"A lot of people seem fascinated by it," he said, adding that this will be the topic of his next book. **WHL**



John Ramsey, the station's engineer, operates the new mixing board in 1978.

Courtesy photo

WWUH Milestones

- **1968:** Signs on as the most powerful stereo educational station in New England
- **1969:** First daily show dedicated to the underground music scene, "The Gothic Blimp Works"
- **1974:** Adopts 24/7 broadcasting format
- **1976:** Features Jazz 30+ hours a week
- **1977:** First live broadcast of the Monday Night Jazz series from Bushnell Park – a tradition that continues today
- **1980:** Broadcasts folk and acoustic programming weekdays from 6-9 a.m.
- **1992:** Held first of nine annual Folk Next Door concerts featuring local artists
- **1997:** Becomes first station in the state to being Internet streaming

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Music Together meets at both Congregation Beth Israel and St. James's Episcopal Church.

Photo by Cheyney Barrieau

Puppies, props and parties

Religious institutions go beyond worship, share their space with community groups

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Music lessons. Prop storage. Dog obedience training. AA meetings. Dance classes. Nursery schools.

All occur in local places of worship.

Educational, social and service-oriented groups that meet at First Church of Christ Congregational include the 12th Boy Scout troop founded in the United States and a meditative yoga class.

Calling the boundaries between its congregation and the community groups "permeable," Senior Pastor Geordie Campbell said, "We find over time that the people who use our building begin to consider this their spiritual address even if they're not members of the church."

One example, he said, is the City Singers of Hartford. The group needed a place to practice and give concerts, Campbell said.

"The artistic director grew up in this church; she brought them here," he explained.

"Our church is used by a lot of groups," added Covenant Congregational Church Pastor Tom VanDerMeid.

In addition to all their own programs, the Preschool of West Hartford, three Alcoholics Anonymous groups and the National Alliance on Mental Illness are among those using space on Westminster Drive.

Beth Sciarra, director of the

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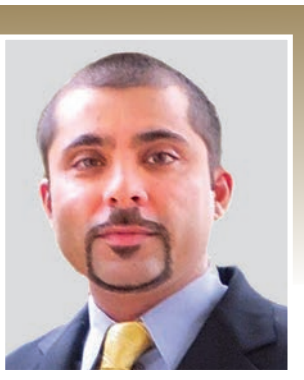

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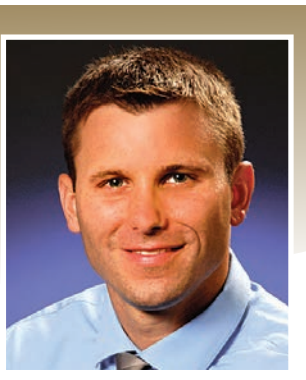

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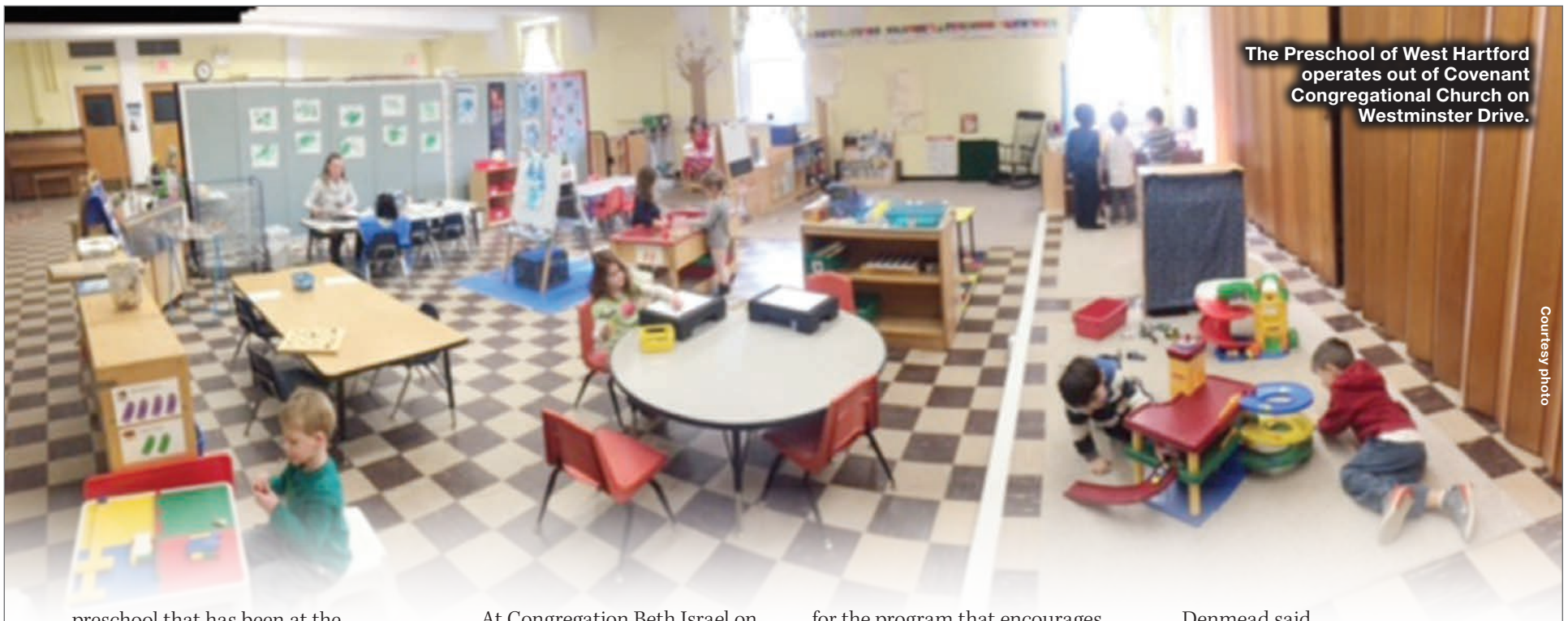

The Preschool of West Hartford operates out of Covenant Congregational Church on Westminster Drive.

Courtesy photo

preschool that has been at the church for more than 20 years, said, "I walked into a very good situation."

When she bought it, the program was established in several rooms on the ground floor; it was licensed and came complete with furnishings, materials and an outdoor playground. Each Friday, the preschool rolls up its rugs and moves aside furniture so a coffee hour can be held in the fellowship hall on Sunday after Mass. The church also uses a classroom for its children's religious program.

Sciarra called the rented space "beautiful for us."

"We have a wonderful location and a beautiful and functional facility. We have been blessed by God with so many people able to use our church in such varied and productive ways," VanDerMeid said. "It does take a little bit of flexibility and patience because there are different ways of doing things ... but it's worked pretty well for us."

At Congregation Beth Israel on Farmington Avenue, space is used by a variety of organizations for meetings, conferences, presentations, training sessions, rehearsals, classes and cultural events including an Irish dance class, an American citizenship class, Stroller Strides and Music Together of West Hartford and Farmington Valley LLC.

"We have been blessed with a magnificent facility and wish to share it with the community," said Senior Rabbi Michael Pincus.

"We have held our Music Together classes at Congregation Beth Israel since 2005," said Catherine Denmead, center director for the program that encourages families to make music together.

It has also held classes at St. James's Episcopal Church since 2011.

"The Music Together program is all about the joy of family music-making, so it's important that our participants arrive at a warm and comfortable environment to share this special experience. Congregation Beth Israel and St. James's both strive to create welcoming environments for families, so it's been a perfect match," she said.

Although the program is not affiliated with either church, "many of their members have participated in our program and vice versa," Denmead said.

"[W]e feel that we're very much a part of our West Hartford commiunity and want to be good neighbors."

–Rev. Stacy Emerson, First Baptist Church of West Hartford

Bethany Lutheran Church on Boulevard opens its doors to a young adult AA group, Yamaha music lessons and blood drives by the American Red Cross. It also sponsors a Boy Scout troop.

"We have something going on every week, sometimes every day. It's nice to have all that activity," Pastor Timothy Krieger said.

There is much more activity at First Baptist Church of West Hartford on North Main Street.

Between its own activities and those of its many and diverse partners, the building is open daily from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., the Rev. Stacy Emerson explained.

There's Our Children's Center, a nonprofit daycare that has been meeting weekdays for 20 years, The German School of Connecticut that teaches the language and culture to all ages every Saturday morning and the area's largest AA meeting on Sunday nights. The offices of the

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Kathy Mayer signals her Goldendoodle, who holds the title of Trick Dog Champion – the first Goldendoodle in the country to have earned that title.

Courtesy photo

American Baptist Churches of Connecticut occupy one hallway while rooms are also used by a computer use group, Al-Anon, Covenant to Care and Meals on Wheels.

"We're constantly getting requests from groups needing space," Emerson said.

The church is accomodating, she added, "because we feel that we're very much a part of our West Hartford community and want to be good neighbors. We want to share in the life of our community in the way we can do best. It's a cental part of our ministry."

Another church with a variety of community activities is St. James's Episcopal Church.

"We've been really gifted with this tremendous building; ... this building is enormous," Rector Robert Hooper said.

Built in 1951, "They put a lot of resources into it and now we can share it with the greater community."

Seven AA groups, a business networking group and the Hartford Chorale meet weekly at the church on Farmington Avenue.

The Hartford Audubon Society, a couple of men's support groups and the Samaritans, a support group for those coping with suicide loss, also meet at the church.

The Bridge Family Center rents what was the rectory for its offices and uses additional space in the main building for training and other large events.

A prayer and support group for Pentecostal women of African descent meets there regularly, a group of therapists gathers monthly for lectures, the German School of Connecticut holds two annual parties, and the Boy Scouts use the church hall for its annual soap box derby, which, Hooper said, "is the loudest event ever," adding, "It's really fun."

When Music Together needed more space, it, too, came to hold classes at St. James's.

"We provide space for free" in some instances while "other groups are contractual, with long-term leases," Hooper said, adding, "It's much busier than it used to be."

Two miles away, on South Quaker Lane, the basement at The Catholic Church of Saint Mark the Evangelist has been taken over by Conard High School's safe graduation program.

"They use our entire church basement as their staging area, storage area and workshop," Fr. William Metzler said, estimating the space is about 60 feet by 120 feet.

Volunteers of the safe graduation party have been using the space for years. Karen Presing, this year's safe graduation decorating chairperson, said all the panels used to divide up space in the school's cafeteria are stored at the church, along with paint, tools, materials and props from previous years, including a dragon and a large robot.

"It's wonderful," she said.

Metzler agreed, saying, "What they're doing is a wonderfully worthwhile project that we will

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There are many children activities going on at the Covenant Congregational Church.

Courtesy photo

continue to do our best to be supportive of. If they were not there, we might find a use for it, but we have enough space at this point. It's not an inconvenience for us. We try to be good neighbors."

Rev. Dr. Len De Roche said the Universalist Church of West Hartford on Fern Street sponsors about 10 different AA groups along with a Boy Scout troop.

"Our church is also used by The Hartt School of Music Monday through Friday and sometimes on Saturdays to conduct lessons," he said.

In addition, the church hosts The Sounding Board, a folk and acoustic coffeehouse, on Saturday nights from September to May.

"It's mostly tradition. The Sounding Board started in a church basement and, as it has grown and matured, its concert series has operated in four different parish halls over the years," said Jim Rigby, who's been involved with the coffeehouse most of its existence.

It moved to the Universalist Church in the late 1990s.

"The Sounding Board probably would not be able to operate as an all-volunteer, nonprofit arts presenting organization without partnering with churches to provide space at affordable rents throughout its 43-year history," he said.

The Hartford Obedience Training Club, the oldest training club in continual existence in the country, which was founded in 1937, trains owners and their dogs at Elmwood Community Church. The club rents out the basement hall for five hours one night a week.

"They call themselves 'the little church with the big heart' and they definitely are," said club secretary Diane Connelly, praising everyone from parishioners to trustees.

"They have been very accommodating," she said.

"It's difficult to find a space to rent," she said, noting that most landlords "cringe when you say 'dog,'" never mind lots of dogs.

"The church was very willing to work with us," she said, noting that coming "highly recommended" and

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"with references" helped.

The training club had been meeting at the American Legion on Raymond Road before its building was removed 10 years ago to make room for Blue Back Square. Before that, it met in the gym at Watkinson School, and, before that, at the West Hartford Town Hall.

Also meeting at Elmwood Community Church are a photography club, Alcoholics Anonymous, Families Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

"The Sounding Board probably would not be able to operate as an all-volunteer, nonprofit arts presenting organization without partnering with churches to provide space at affordable rents throughout its 43-year history."

–Jim Rigby

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"They call themselves 'the little church with the big heart' and they definitely are. ... They have been very accommodating."

–Diane Connelly, The Hartford Obedience Training Club

Other congregations also meet in churches.

On Sunday afternoons, two different congregations rent space for their services, Pastor Dave Congdon said.

This is common across town. The Chinese Baptist Church of Greater Hartford meets at the First Baptist Church.

The Latino congregation, Manantial de Gracia, meets in the chapel at First Church of Christ Congregational every Sunday.

"They did not have the resources for a place [of their own] to gather," Campbell explained of the relationship that began several years ago.

At Covenant Congregational Church, a Korean Presbyterian church worships on Sundays and Wednesdays while a small Brazilian Baptist congregation worships in the church on Sunday evenings.

"It's nice that the facility is used as much as it is. It's good stewardship of the facilities we have. It's a great location and a beautiful sanctuary and functional facilities. ... I think that's what God wants. I think that God's pleased that our church is used so much," VanDerMeid said. **WHL**

The Hartford Obedience Training Club has been meeting at Elmwood Community Church for 10 years.

Photo by Pam Hastings

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The end of an era

West Hartford's longest-serving mayor will end tenure this spring

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

After giving the majority of his adult life back to his community as its mayor, Scott Slifka will soon pass his gavel on to a new leader.

He made the announcement that he will step down this spring during his annual State of the Town address, held at the end of January, and has since begun acclimating to a new reality and the new professional role that prompted his decision.

"I still know it was the right thing to do," he said on a recent afternoon standing in his office at Town Hall. He has repeatedly called the decision "bittersweet," but remained confident that it was time for him to make the change, though it came as a surprise to everyone including him.

Slifka, who was first elected to the Town Council in 2001 and served as deputy mayor from 2002 until being elected mayor in 2004 at the age of 30, was reelected in November for another term.

Just before Christmas, he was offered a promotion to deputy general counsel of the The LEGO Group.

"This was not planned in any way," he said just a few days after his State of the Town address.

As Deputy General Counsel of The LEGO Group, Slifka will take on a global role, reporting directly to LEGO's general counsel in Denmark and will oversee a team of lawyers with operations based in London, Denmark and Asia.

His promotion was announced by LEGO January 25. The new role, Slifka said, "won't be compatible with running a similarly demanding town in one's spare time while trying to be a good husband and father."

Slifka gave his colleagues, town staff and the community plenty of time to adjust to the change, opting to continue his mayoral responsibilities until the adoption of this year's budget – likely making his last public appearance at the Mayor's Charity Ball in early May – rather than stepping down immediately.

Once Slifka leaves the council, a successor from the Democratic party will be appointed. He said he would be "shocked and disappointed" if that successor is not Deputy Mayor Shari Cantor. The vacant seat on the council will then be filled by another Democrat.

Mayor Scott Slifka was offered a promotion in his professional career at the end of last year and subsequently decided his new role would not be compatible with the job of mayor while also working to be a good husband and father. His wife, Noelle, has never known her marriage without Slifka serving as mayor and his daughter, Betsy, has never known life without being the mayor's child. He is pictured with his family at the 2013 Mayors Charity Ball (right) and with his daughter on election night 2015 (left). Slifka said he was surprised that Betsy was moved to tears when he told her of his decision, expressing sadness at all the public events they will no longer appear at together as mayor and daughter.

Since he broke the news, Slifka said he has been touched by the outpouring of thanks from the community, including dozens of letters and emails along with a batch of letters from students at Saint Brigid School that he said brought tears to his eyes.

Making a volunteer career of public service

"The town was already great when I came into office," Slifka said. "I'd like to think I played a small part in making it better, but it was already great. We've had a lot of success and, to a certain extent, I get a lot of the credit, but we have so many good people, particularly in the administration, and I'm confident that I'm leaving behind a great group of colleagues. This is a time when I can leave the town in good hands."

Over the last 12 years, West Hartford has seen economic revitalization and investment in all of the town's commercial areas including Elmwood, Corbin's Corner, Park Road, West Hartford Center and Bishops Corner. All of it has been done without offering tax incentives or subsidies.

Slifka knows one of the most

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public time periods in his leadership was the process to build Blue Back Square, and though he said he is proud of the final product, he remembers more the grit and dedication it took on the part of many – including the community at large – to bring it to fruition.

Chuck Coursey, who served on the Town Council from 2003 to 2009, ending his tenure as deputy mayor, remembers the long hearings and meetings that were part of the process to get Blue Back built, and what he remembers most fondly is being beside Slifka, whose sense of humor made the long hours feel less stressful.

"People all say how talented he is and how good he is at the job, which is true, but one thing people don't always know is how funny and just what a great guy he is," Coursey said. "He has a sarcastic wit. You spend so much time together, the Council becomes a second family."

The day-to-day efforts to keep the town moving forward and improving mean more to Slifka than the major milestones, he said, noting the fact that the town had some transformative things occur through difficult economic times and state funding shortfalls.

"It's not the tangible things that I'm most proud of," he said. "Yes, I'm very proud that I was part of getting Bristow School or Charter Oak School built, and many other projects, but what I'm really proud of is the way we were able to maintain a top notch school system without ever getting the funding we needed from the state. I'm proud that we kept the town affordable while also preserving the services that are so precious."

Coursey agreed that the seemingly small things made all the difference during Slifka's tenure.

"He's such a great leader. He knew how to keep everything measured and never lose perspective or take himself too seriously," Coursey said.

Though it was at times a hard subject to tackle, the Town Council began to right the ship on the town's pension challenges during Slifka's tenure.

"We had to make a decision if we were going to start making contributions [to the pension fund] or let it be dealt with down the road so we didn't have to raise taxes. Not once did we ever take the easy way out. In the state and federal environment right now you're dealing with a lot of comments that predecessors kicked the can down the road," he said. "I feel very confident that we didn't do that here. It's my hometown, so I carry that with me."

Those are the types of things he is hopeful his colleagues will sustain in the years to come.

The town has developed a reputation as a place where the highest quality of development proposals is expected, but also a place where elected officials will be fair and good to work with when hearing plans from those who want to come to town, he said.

"I think the momentum that we have is a very delicate thing and I hope that they will continue to be, as they have been, very cautious about tempting that. You can loose that in a heartbeat. ... If that perception changes, your economic growth could stagnate," he said.

As he looks to the future, Slifka is excited for a new phase of life. He is quick to point out that his wife, Noelle, has never known their marriage without him as mayor and his daughter, Betsy, has never known life that way.

As simple as it seems, he is looking forward to actually having a weekend to himself.

"The challenges of a city don't respect your personal deadlines," he said. "I'm thinking, 'Wow, when I go on vacation this summer I won't have to check my messages all the time. I can be mentally present. I've always had to be in more than one place, even when I'm at home."

Slifka led the town through natural disasters like the October snowstorm 2011, though there were many other emergencies "large and small" over the years, he said.

"... I'm confident that I'm leaving behind a great group of colleagues. This is a time when I can leave the town in good hands."

–Mayor Scott Slifka

"I'm looking forward to not getting heart palpitations when I see bad weather reports about what this is going to mean for the town," he said.

Still, he knows there are things he will miss.

"I'm going to miss a lot of the department directors," he said. "Most people in town have no idea how fantastic these people are."

"I'd be remiss if I didn't mention what a blessing it was to work with Barry Feldman," he added of a previous town manager. "When I first started, essentially he was my mentor. Yes, the town manager is appointed by the council, but in a lot of ways he was teaching me about how to run a town the right way. ... The values he instilled have been continued by [Town Manager Ron Van Winkle]. On the difficult days, Ron's intellect and passion for the community is a gift and it's one of those things that renews you and makes you say, 'I'll stick with this.' The residents need to know how lucky we've been. [Town staff] chose this line of work and the town is all the better for it."

Though Slifka said he quickly sees his time as mayor becoming something for the history books, Coursey is focused on the things Slifka will remain.

"What he'll always be is an exceptional father, an exceptional husband, a great son and brother and, for me, a really great friend," he said.

With change upon him, Slifka does not intend to back away from the political scene entirely.

"I suspect that in the coming years my state and my party may benefit from someone with my skills, perspective and voice," Slifka said during his State of the Town address.

Though he isn't sure at this time what specifically he'd like to do to contribute, as a senior leader in a major global corporation with more than a decade of experience running a successful city, Slifka said, "I don't think a lot of people have that mix of experience and skills. I have something to contribute and I'd like to do that."

Coursey also hopes his friend, who led the town through a "critical point" in its history, will remain politically active.

"He has this very good way about him that breeds transparency and collaboration. In the way he led, he rose above petty, partisan bickering that is so prevalent in our culture today and helped transcend that for everyone for the good of the community." WHL

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Meet Liam

First time author introduces her son's story to readers

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Kimberly Jewell will never forget the moment during a home evaluation when she and her husband were told that their son was severely autistic and would likely never be able to speak.

"That was a very poignant moment," she said. "It's tough not to know when your little one is sick or sad. There are moments when it's hard, with no voice, to know how your child is feeling."

"Speech, it's the hardest part of his autism for us," she said.

The family has learned, however, that just because Liam, 7, cannot speak in a traditional way does not mean that he cannot communicate.

The Jewell family – mom, Kimberly; dad, Greg; and little sister, Lyla, 5 – have come to learn how Liam communicates. It's not with words but with actions.

In her first book, Jewell shares with readers how her son manages to let others know what is on his mind and how others can learn his methods of communication if they spend time with him. She wrote the book from her daughter's perspective.

"I wanted to incorporate both kids in the book," she said. "Lyla is a special girl, she is growing up with an awareness of differences."

Jewell went on to describe her daughter as being very patient with her older brother and she wanted to ensure Lyla had a role in the story.

Jewell, who has a background in human resources and who is currently working in real estate, had never set out to write a book and it happened rather quickly.

She was at the park with her children and began to think of ways to bring awareness to autism, especially those children like her son who are nonverbal.

As thoughts came to mind, she took notes on her phone – not quite sure what she would do with them. It was not long before the idea of a story came to mind and a few days later she sat down at her computer and wrote "Liam's Special Language."

Soon she was researching publishers and found Trafford Publishing.

"I think the thing I wanted to share is that everyone is different," she said.

"Just because my son does not have a voice to speak with does not mean he doesn't feel happy or frustrated."

The book is aimed at children in kindergarten and first grade, and is written simply with colorful illustrations depicting Liam and his sister and the many ways he communicates.

Shortly after her book was published, Jewell and her husband read it to their son's class.

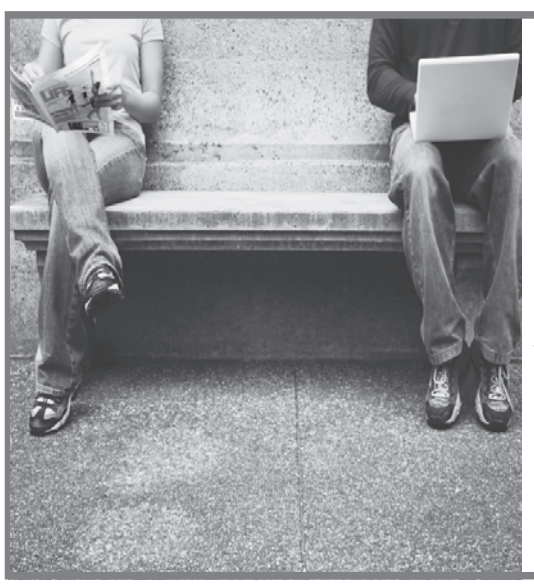
"I wanted to leave that young audience with the message that everyone is different, and that's OK," she said.

The story shares how Liam uses an iPad, a tool that talks for him. He also expresses himself through crying – when he might be scared or sad – or laughing when he feels good.

Although she had never intended to become an author, Jewell was inspired

Kimberly Jewell, with her husband Greg Jewell, wrote her first book to bring awareness to autism. Her son, Liam, has autism.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith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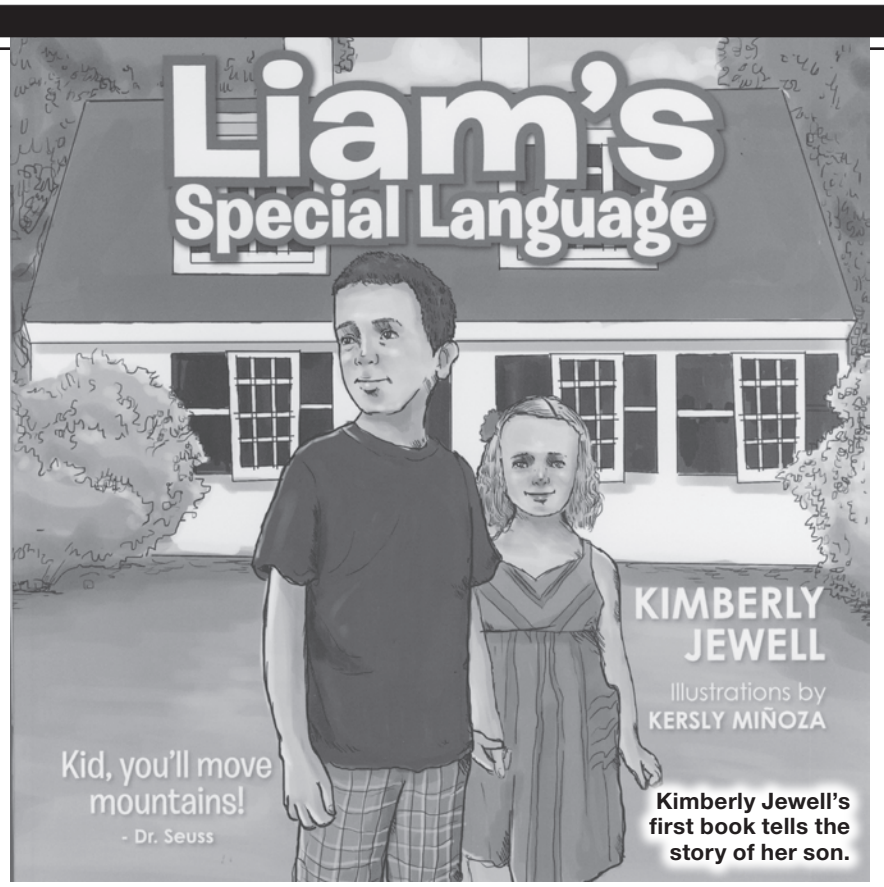

Kimberly Jewell's first book tells the story of her son.

not only by her children but also by her dad who died in 2014; she said she wanted to do something in honor of the man who raised her.

"I did see good come out of this," she said of the fact other families have discovered the book and it has been shared throughout Liam's school and with parents of students there.

"It's a tough diagnosis to get. If you can find some goodness to get out of it, it makes the whole diagnosis easier," she said.

Greg Jewell has noticed that since the book has been published those at his son's school, most of whom were aware of Liam's autism, were making efforts to figure the boy out because they now had a better understanding of him.

"I think he understands when people are nice to him," Greg Jewell said of his son. "He can't say that, but over time I can see he appreciates it. When he is mad, part of it is that he can't tell you in a conventional way."

Jewell's hope for her son is that he will one day be able to gain some speech and also grow to be independent.

Kimberly Jewell called the book "probably the largest professional accomplishment in my life" and said she would be interested in writing another.

When Greg Jewell first learned of his wife's idea to write a book he initially thought it would be a challenge for her as raising a child with special needs puts a lot on her plate.

"She took everything on herself. She did it and did a wonderful job," he said.

Kimberly Jewell grew up in Farmington, attending Union School and graduating from Farmington High School. A copy of her book is now available in her old elementary school's library. She earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and management from Siena College and spent more than 10 yeas working in human resources.

She and her husband moved to West Hartford 10 years ago and recently celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary. WHL

"I think the thing I wanted to share is that everyone is different."
–Kimberly Jewell

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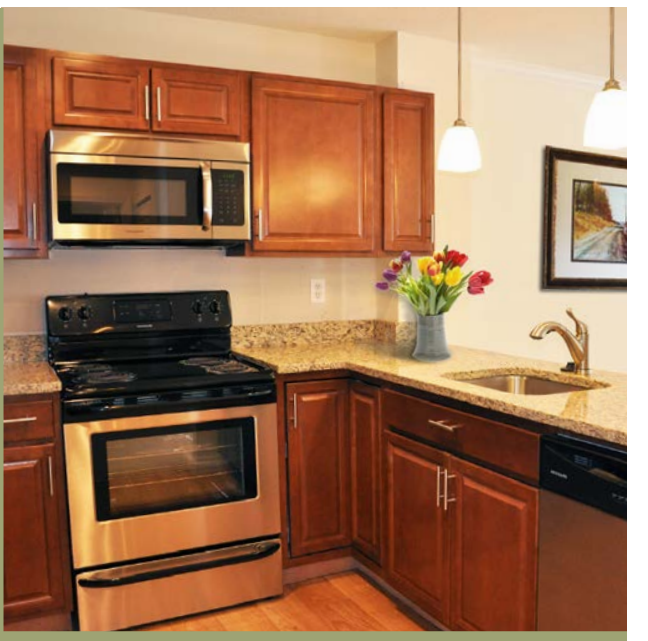

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Tax return fraud is increasing

How to prevent it and what to do if it happens to you

by Nancy Thompson
Editor

Last year, the state of Connecticut stopped about $38 million in fraudulent tax returns, about double the amount from the year before. In 2012, the amount was about $7 million.

To say it's become an epidemic is an understatement.

"It's a constant, constant battle," said Kevin Sullivan, commissioner of the state's Department of Revenue Services. "There are more breaches and more energetic thieves, but we're working harder and smarter."

Fraudulent tax returns have become a big issue for states and for the federal government, and all are taking precautions to prevent them.

"We're doing a number of things," Sullivan said, adding that the department cannot reveal all of its new measures. "We have three layers of screening on all returns. We use comparison data, and this year, employers' W-2 forms will come in January instead of March so we'll have that information. We have definitely and deliberately slowed down, and first-time filers will not have the option of direct deposit. Where we see issues we want to buy time."

He said taxpayers filing state returns electronically can use the taxpayer service center's online site, which is highly secure and available at no charge, and urged people hiring a tax accountant to be sure the person is reputable.

"The Better Business Bureau is a good source, and seniors and people on limited incomes can have their returns done at their senior center or through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service," Sullivan said.

Taxpayers can do their part to help, too.

Filing early is an effective way to deter thieves.

"The sooner you file, the less likely it is that some crook will file before you do," Sullivan said.

Bruce Filingeri, a certified public accountant and tax partner at Sheptoff, Reuber and Company, P.C. in Glastonbury, offers clients several tips to minimize the chance of becoming the victim of identity theft and the possibility of having their tax return filed fraudulently. He tells clients not to carry their Social Security card or any other document with a Social Security number on it; not to give a business their Social Security number unless required; protect financial information; check their credit report every 12 months; keep personal information in your home secure; and to protect personal computers by using firewalls and anti-spam/virus software, updating security patches and changing passwords for Internet accounts.

Matt Hill, a certified public accountant and tax expert with an office in Wethersfield, offered several tips for decreasing the likelihood of a fraudulent tax return and advice to anyone who learns their taxes have been filed fraudulently.

"In order to minimize the likelihood of someone filing your taxes before you, don't give out your Social Security number or birthdate or prepare your taxes utilizing an unsecure network," he said.

"You would be surprised how many individuals file their taxes at Starbucks or Burger King."

When taxpayers file early, it provides a two-week window for the government to deposit a refund into a fraudster's account.

If it does happen, he offers this suggestion: "If you discover your taxes have been filed

fraudulently, even though you may face a long wait time on the phone, contact the tax authorities immediately. Doing so may save you significant time waiting for the IRS or state to sort through the fraud and allow you to properly file your returns."

It's also important not to reply to phone calls or emails from people claiming to be with the state or federal tax agencies.

"We and the IRS contact taxpayers only by letter, not phone calls or emails," said Sullivan, who himself was targeted in a scam phone call last year by someone claiming to be from the "Internal Revenue Services."

An unwelcome surprise

Many taxpayers have no idea that someone else has stolen their information and filed their tax return until they get a letter from the IRS.

"Dear Taxpayer," it reads. "Someone may have attempted to impersonate you by using your name and Social Security number …"

The letter goes on to explain that the IRS has removed the incorrect return and corrected the bad information and will flag the account for extra scrutiny in the future.

This year, the IRS is also assigning personal identification numbers to taxpayers whose accounts have been hacked, which should help prevent a recurrence, but millions of others are still at risk.

Some blame the recent spike in the number of fraudulent returns on data breaches involving Anthem, JP Morgan Chase debit cards and identity theft rings in Florida and elsewhere, but thieves have many ways to get personal information.

The IRS, the states and the tax industry are working together on several new initiatives to thwart them, including new password standards for tax software and increased efforts to share information about identity theft schemes, and efforts to increase awareness among taxpayers.

A recent bulletin issued by the IRS lists several steps, including more than 20 pieces of shared data to help the software industry and the IRS stop fraudulent returns, information about the length of time it took to create an electronic return, new password standards to access tax software along with a new timed lockout feature and limited unsuccessful login attempts, and the addition of three security questions.

More information on the new steps are detailed online at irs.gov/Individuals/Taxes-Security-Together and IRS publication 4524.

Sullivan has this advice for anyone who believes their tax return was filed fraudulently despite the new safeguards: "Call the IRS or the DRS immediately or go to either agency immediately online," he said, adding that taxpayers who may have a problem will hear about it by mail. **WHL**

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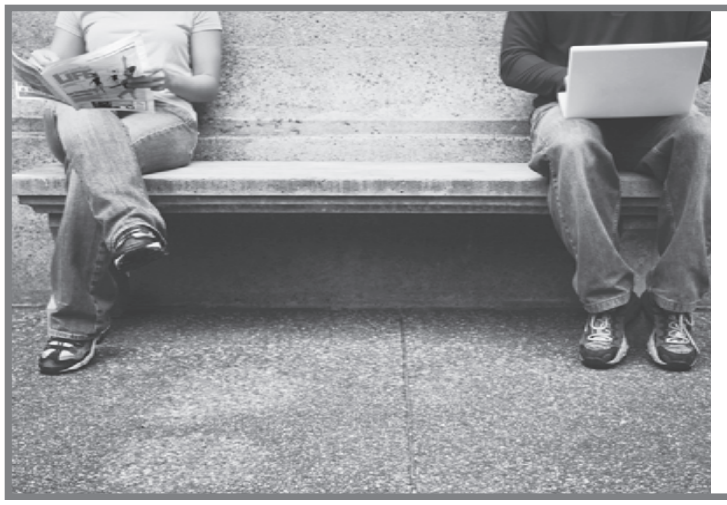

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Planning to spend

How to manage disposable income

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

Whether a person is 28 or 68, they want to go to concerts, enjoy a meal at a restaurant with friends or take a trip. With the high cost of living and the importance of saving money, having funds for these "inessential" purchases may seem impossible.

Local experts say it is a possibility, as long as careful planning and budgeting is done.

Diane Fisher, senior vice president of investments with the FDW Group of Raymond James in West Hartford, said 'budget' is a word people of all ages balk at, but it's an important concept to grasp and execute. Certified Financial Planner Nancy Fellinger of planningWise Wealth in Simsbury agreed.

"For absolutely anyone at any stage in life, it's essential to have a spending plan," she said. "I call it a spending plan as opposed to a budget because most people, I think, kind of bristle at the thought

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of a budget. They think, 'Oh, it's deprivation, the things I can't do because I'm on a budget.'"

The basic concept is to make sure all expenses are tracked, and identifying what is essential, Fellinger said. Putting that plan into practice is the challenge.

For the Millennial generation, those born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s, Fisher said setting up a budget after graduating high school or college is "the most important thing." It can be easy to do; going online, there are many budget forms available, or, many financial advisors offer their services to young people for free.

"They can find a financial advisor who can help them set up a budget – there are a lot of goodhearted people out there who will spend the time," she said. "It's all overwhelming unless you have some certain knowledge of it."

Fisher acknowledged that saving money, especially for inessential spending, is difficult.

"The game changer is student loans," she said. "The money they used to put towards discretionary stuff [goes to loans] – they almost have another mortgage or rent."

Fellinger said the challenge many people have is not just distinguishing what qualifies as discretionary, but making choices between those items. If a person wants to watch a movie, do they go to the movies, or get a monthly Netflix account? If they want to go to the museum, do they wait and go on a free or reduced admission day or pay full price? If they want a cup of coffee in the morning, do they make it at home or stop at a coffee shop?

"It's about being conscious of not only what's being bought, but what other alternatives there are," she said. "Sometimes it comes down to, 'Yeah, I've thought about this, but this experience of having this cup of coffee means something to me and I'm going to make a choice to do that … I may need to make some changes in other areas of my life so I can do that and not be stretching myself.'"

People need to realize that if they handle their finances properly, they can still get concert tickets or go out to dinner, Fisher said, but it's most important to save first. At any age, people should save 10 percent of their income, a practice she said is harder now than it was in the past, and avoid impulse purchases.

When it comes to determining how much to set aside for discretionary spending, Fisher said it can be hard to calculate it, percentage-wise, but she recommends including everything someone wants to spend outside of the essentials. It's necessary to go through all expenses – Netflix may seem like only $9 a month and Hulu only $11 – to determine what truly is necessary.

Fellinger quoted baseball great Yogi Berra, who said, "Ninety percent of the game is half mental." Much of what drives the success of a spending plan is a person's outlook and how they approach it mentally.

"If we're doing it in a positive kind of way – this is something I can do, this is positive for myself, I feel really good about this – it's going to take [you] in one direction," she said. "If it's perceived as a drag or punishment, it's not going to be good."

Regardless of how limited a budget is, Fellinger said including disposable income as part of a budget is important, because the things it's spent on are what makes life enjoyable. She said people need to look at the entirety of their finances and other resources, including the time spent, energy invested and the return they get on an experience.

"If it's a matter that life is tight because of other necessary expenses – you're budgeting not with money, but with time," she said. "You're looking at expenses not just as dollars, but as time, as energy, as what is nurturing. … You can spend a lot of money on entertainment and still not feel fulfilled." **WHL**

planningWise Wealth, part of Coburn & Meredith, Inc., is at 1 Old Mill Lane in Simsbury. Visit www.planningwisewealth.com or call 860-784-2605 for more information. FDW Advisory Group is located at 29 South Main St., Suite 210 in West Hartford. For more information, call 860-920-5040 or visit fdwgroup.website.raymondjames.com.

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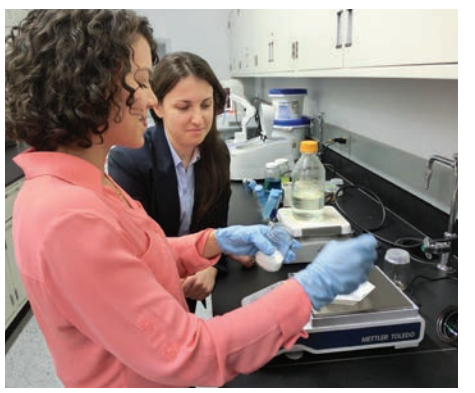
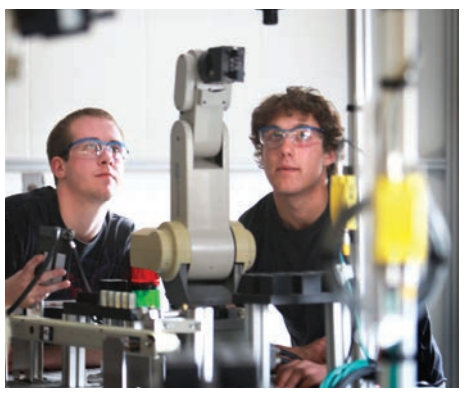

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All jazzed up

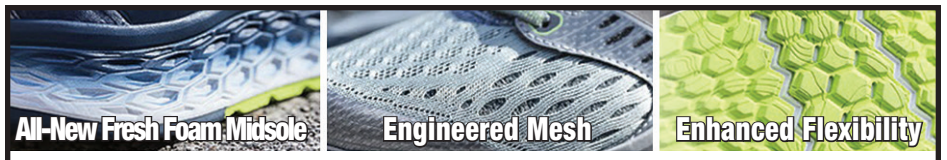
Allegra Levy prepares for second album

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Allegra Levy is making a name for herself in the jazz scene – as a singer, composer and band leader.

She returned to New York City last summer from nearly a year in Hong Kong where she was the artist in residence at the Four Seasons Hotel Blue Bar and, as this article went to press, the Hall High graduate was set to record her second album.

Courtesy photos



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Her debut album, Lonely City, was released in 2014. It was produced by John McNeil, a trumpeter, one of her former professors and a mentor.

"They were all my original tunes that I'd written over the years starting when I was about 17. The truth is, a lot of them are about my ex-boyfriend and my current boyfriend," Levy said in a recent telephone interview.

In addition to the title song are 10 others, including "Anxiety," "I Don't Want to Be In Love," "I'm Not OK" and "Why Do I."

It was a finished product when handed to SteepleChase LookOut, which distributed it, later approaching her about doing another, she said.

Calling herself "a romantic person," Levy said, "Lately I've been writing a lot happier and a lot sappier stuff."

Part of that is due to her boyfriend who relocated from to New York City to be with her.

While her first album was arranged and fine tuned, this second one will be more organic, as well as, perhaps, more upbeat and fun, she said. Like her debut album, all the songs are original and autobiographical and "will flow together lyrically." She's also written lyrics to jazz tunes that have never had words, saying, "I loved their melodies and I just found them really compelling."

One of them, "Lullaby of the Orient," was written by Duke Jordan while touring Japan.

"I was inspired by my own experience in Asia to write lyrics to his melody," Levy said.

The music will be played by "an unbelievable all-star cast of musicians."

Recording was set to be done in a day in the studio.

The musicians are Billy Drummond on drums, Jay Anderson on bass, Carmen Staaf on piano, Stephen Riley on saxophone and Kirk Knuffke on trumpet.

"We might not even rehearse before we record," she said in early February of "trying to make some magic with it all."

Calling the making of "a true jazz album" both exciting and frightening, she also said the experience was nerve-racking and humbling.

"This is kind of an experiment to see what happens, taking my original tunes that haven't been slaved over for centuries and seeing what can happen with the right people," she said.

"Jazz musicians are all improvisers, but in order to be those kind of improvisers, where everything sounds like it's been written out, you have to practice a lot. ... It isn't just a random idea that came out of nowhere. Improvisation isn't just the pure spontaneous process that everyone says, a lot goes into trying to make things sound good."

The album is expected out this fall.

Reflecting on her younger years, Levy, who attended Whiting Lane Elementary School, Solomon Schechter Day School, King Philip Middle

–Reviews–

"... fresh ... exotic ... and beyond the ordinary"
–Ben Ratliff, New York Times

"Levy is the new pin up girl for cool."
–Midwest Record

"Allegra Levy has a pleasing alto, a sultry delivery and a propensity to swing. Her debut album, Lonely City, is consistently engaging."
–Allen Morrison, Downbeat Magazine

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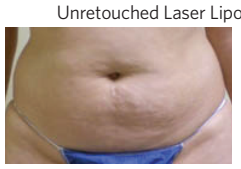

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While in Hong Kong, Allegra Levy performs with her pianist Bob Mocarsky, a Conard High School graduate.

School and Hall High, said "Growing up in West Hartford was pretty amazing."

She recalled attending a Pops 'n Jazz concert at the age of 6.

"I saw some of the jazz singers, the soloists, come out and do their spotlighted performances and their pretty dresses and it was what I wanted to do for the rest of my time."

In sixth and in eighth grade, she was in Pops 'n Jazz as part of the KP Singers and the Sixth Dimension.

Her older brother, Aidan, played the saxophone in the King Philip jazz band and she remembers hearing him practice and going to his concerts.

During elementary and middle school, Levy was involved in West Hartford JCC Community Theater shows, and the Connecticut Children's Music and Theatre Company summer program at the University of Hartford.

Her first performance at King Philip was in "Brigadoon," – "the one year they had a musical," she said. "I was in sixth grade and I played Fran – which was actually changed from Frank for me. I was a bartender in that production. Then I was in '[A] Midsummer Night's Dream' as Puck. And then I was Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet.'

"I didn't make a lot of friends that way, because it's every girl's envy to play Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet' and I remember someone actually cornering me in the bathroom, angrily, after I got that role – pretty heavy drama for middle school."

Recalling that performance, she said she fell off the stage during rehearsal and broke her wrist.

"I did Juliet in a cast," she said.

It was also in middle school that she began writing songs.

"When I was at Camp Jewell … I wrote my first song there. It was terrible. I still remember it. I'd just gone through a breakup with my middle school boyfriend and I wrote a sappy song on a Post-It note."

Describing herself as the daughter of nicejewishmom.com and a columnist for the Journal Inquirer in Manchester, Levy said, "My parents are journalists."

Her saxophone-playing brother went on to become a jazz journalist on staff at JazzTimes who also writes a weekly jazz column for

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“I really think that jazz and music are definitely a vehicle for change in the world. It’s a universal language and it should be used to help others and make this a more peaceful place.”

–Allegra Levy

The Village Voice. Last year, his first biography, “Dirty Blvd.: The Life and Music of Lou Reed” was published by Chicago Review Press.

“Words became the epicenter of my household, and I definitely loved to write in general, all through my whole life, but music was my passion,” Levy said. “So, it was only natural that I became a lyricist and a composer; music and lyrics went so naturally together for me.”

She credits Aidan as the reason she’s a jazz musician, saying, “He’s always been an inspiration and a mentor to me.”

She also said King Philip School’s “unbelievable” music program was “partially responsible.”

In addition to music, Levy’s philanthropic efforts began in middle school. Together with her mother, she’d bake elaborate cookies and sell them to raise money for Gifts of Music, which provides music lessons to students who cannot afford them.

“We did a lot of projects like that,” she said of the charitable causes she and her mother supported.

“At Hall, I remember I was on the tennis team; I was heavily involved in theater; I wanted to do acting. I wrote occasionally for the paper. I was in Pops ’n Jazz. I was in all the private choruses. I was in the jazz band and I did dance and I literally was the queen of extracurricular activities.”

Levy left a legacy as founder of the Hall High Human Rights Coalition, begun with history teacher Elizabeth Devine, who retired last year. Levy planned a rally with speakers that drew 300 people to the steps of Town Hall to save Darfur. In addition to raising “a ton of money,” the event also raised awareness, she said.

“For me, that was the most memorable experience other than music,” Levy said. “I’m so excited to know that they’ve gone on to do even bigger and better things.”

After graduating in 2007, Levy attended the New England Conservatory of Music, as have several other Hall jazz musicians. One of them is Richie Barshay, a world-renowned jazz drummer, who played on her debut album as well as at a concert with her last fall at Congregation Beth Israel.

It was at NEC she began defining herself as a performer, creating her own sound and writing her own songs.

“That’s what started it all,” Levy said.

In college, she was involved with Musicians for Humanity, a group that put on concerts for global causes. After recently reconnecting with someone who performed in those concerts with her, she’s looking to do more of them.

It’s fulfilling, Levy said, “to give back through music. … I want to combine my passion for helping others with music beyond just the immediate musical experience. … I really think that jazz and music are definitely a vehicle for

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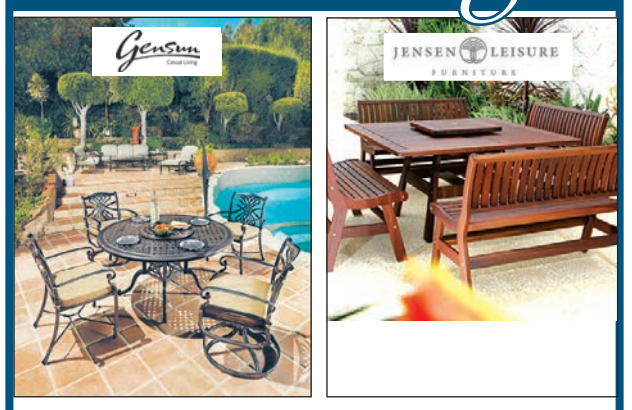

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Allegra Levy, 5, dances to the music at her birthday party.

Courtesy photos

change in the world. It's a universal language and it should be used to help others and make this a more peaceful place. I want to still do that, but I think I still have a lot of work to do as a musician."

Music, however, does not pay her rent.

Upon moving to New York City, Levy worked for Advocacy Lab to put human rights curriculum into inner city schools.

Now she works at the United Nations International School in the music department, combining her love of music and her commitment to human rights.

"To be honest, I didn't know the amount of struggle" that would be required, she said. "Nobody ever really says how hard things are going to be."

Creatively, making music is fulfilling, but financially it's difficult, she said.

"There's this kind of self doubt that you wrestle with every single day. I swear, every single day I say to myself, 'Maybe I'll stop doing this. Maybe I'll just give up.' And I never do, and I don't plan to, but it's definitely a challenge to keep going in this very different world."

She described her second album as "the ultimate test," explaining, "I'm still creating my sound and who I am as a performer and an artist, and I'm excited to have this opportunity to see what happens when everything isn't perfected before we walk into the studio."

Asked if she's attained any of her dreams, Levy replied, "My dream when I was in college was to have a piece of work of mine reviewed by Ben Ratliff in The New York Times. That was my dream, and then I got it. I got a pretty pleasant review in the New York Times for my first album by Ben Ratliff and I was just so excited, and then it passed. And then, you keep working, striving for the next goal, and there's no such thing as perfection as a musician. ... There's always this sense of betterment and improvement that can happen. It's the endless abyss.

"At the end of the day, I think that I do music because if I can reach anyone with any of my songs or lyrics and make them feel better, I'll have done my job." **WHL**

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It's all here

Design district serves both homeowners and contractors

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Celebrating its 10th anniversary year, the Home Design District is growing.

"We are the only 'home focused' shopping area in Greater Hartford. From siding to draperies, tiles to showers we have it all," said Budget Blinds of West Hartford owner Ruth Terray.

Jerry Reed, owner of Joe Cornfield's Wallpaper and Window Treatments, agreed, saying, "You can get a lot done within a very short distance."

Custom Framing Depot owner Marvin Janow said, "Ten years ago, most of the home-related businesses existed on their own without a common core. That's when the Home Design District formed, with the intent to emphasize all of the different home improvement businesses in the area, and the interaction of each. Almost anything needed in the building and decorating can be found within the borders of the Home Design District."

Calling the district "a unique group of businesses," Reed also stressed members' experience.

"We're all locally owned and the original founding members have all been in business a minimum of 20 years. We are all experts in our field," and can offer customers much more than home box stores.

Alexi Dahlstrom, marketing director for Dalene Flooring Carpet One added, "Staying on trend while maintaining a legacy of quality products and workmanship is only possible with decades of experience," noting that Dalene Flooring has more than 67 years. "Banding together as a group has made each business stronger and as a whole more capable of delivering on our customers home improvement needs."

Dahlstrom added that it's been rewarding to see increased name recognition and trust of the district.

Calling the district "a conglomeration of small family businesses," Rob Ludgin, owner of Coastal Tool and Supply said, "It gives people the opportunity to shop with local people and people who own their own businesses and take pride in what they do."

Customers will see a continuity of faces, such as his and those of his wife and his son.

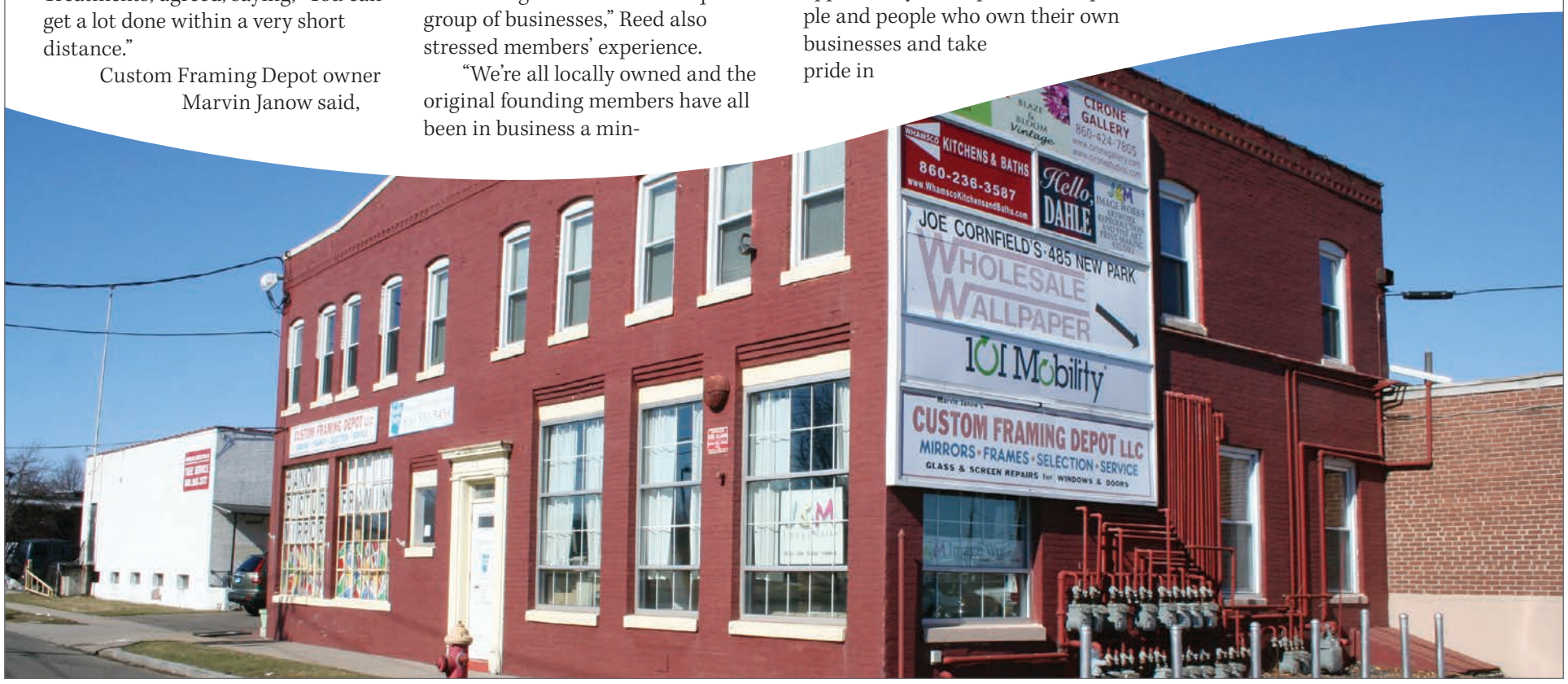
"Because we're all small businesses, we try to take exceptional care of our customers," Ludgin said, adding, "We rely on repeat customers."

Like other district members, "we survive by word of mouth referrals," said Gina Bunch of Daley Moving and Storage Inc.

She noted that, these days, more people are downsizing and utilizing the storage facilities.

"Our clients are looking for quality workmanship ... and although we try to be as cost competitive as possible, the cheapest price isn't always the best product," she said.

A new trend in home renovation work is that



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clients are looking for ways to incorporate smart technology and style into their homes with such products as waterproof vinyls and cork, wood-look tiles and new carpet weaves and other ways to keep their homes fresh and modern.

At Custom Framing, Janow said, "Our customers are looking for ideas, current styles and colors, how to piece contemporary and retro together, how to re-purpose a much loved piece, and how to curate their homes within the current trends. Picture framing is a great way for them to achieve these goals and we are happy to help them navigate the process."

Cathy Davis, president of Bartlett Brainard Products, said, "The average customer in today's home improvement market wants to see all their choices. They want someone to give them expert advice and guidance so there is no surprises. With today's products being highly specialized, homeowners are searching for someone to assist them, not just sell them."

Reed has seen the district evolve. Not only is it becoming "a real destination point for consumers" but it's also begun to attract businesses.

Andrew Bachman said he moved his business, Trout Brook Landscaping, from Bloomfield to 69 Talcott Road to be closer to both his customers and his vendors, such as a stone mason, a landscape materials supplier, a heavy equipment operator and the chartered landscape recycling center.

"They're all located in the Home

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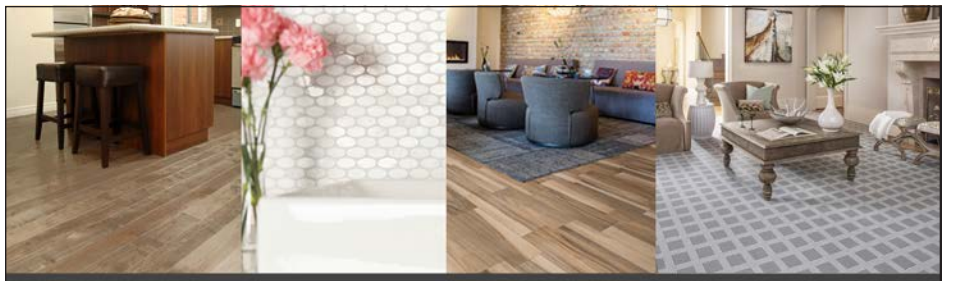

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HOME *design* DISTRICT

Design District, too," he said.

It's not unusual for "two or three members to be working with the same customer to create a wonderful experience ... and get a lot done," Reed said.

"It's a real network," District President Brian Knies, owner of Tile America and Surfaces in Stone, said. "Any home improvement project involves many trades and suppliers" and members know each other and work well together to coordinate services for a client.

The newest member of the district is Raymour & Flanigan.

"They're a bit different, but we thought they'd be a good partner," Knies said.

On May 14, the store will host a mini home show spotlighting HDD members who will feature their newest products and offer the latest how-tos. A series of workshops is also being planned for the show.

In addition to growth spurred by district members, the streetscape of the Home Design District is also headed for an evolution.

The town has chosen a consultant, Fuss & O'Neill, to conduct a study with regard to transit-oriented development on New Park Avenue. The CTfastrak stations in West Hartford, along with a potential rail stop in the future, opened the door to such development opportunities, Director of Community Services Mark McGovern said.

A change to zoning code was made in 2014 to permit residential uses in the general business zone and the general industrial zone, a change that will make mixed-use development possible along New Park Avenue, McGovern said.

West Hartford then applied for a Transit-Oriented Development Planning Grant through the Office of Policy Management in December of 2014. The West Hartford project was one of 11 prospective planning projects chosen by OPM.

The current TOD zone – the Flatbush and Elmwood fastrack station area – is defined in the original TOD Planning Grant application as a "unique commercial district."

It notes the "significant industrial employment centers" of the area, including major commercial employers, the Home Design District and the single- and multi-family residential neighborhoods that line the TOD zone.

The town's vision for the future outlined in the TOD planning grant application is for a more walkable and mixed-use redevelopment of the New Park Avenue area, including dedicated walking and bicycle networks from neighborhoods to commercial and municipal destinations, programs that support and encourage alternate transportation modes, and land use decisions that support smart growth.

The study will also examine a potential road diet that would modify New Park Avenue's existing four lanes into a single travel lane in each direction, a two-way turn lane in the center and bike lanes in each direction.

Knies said, "It's a growing area. We have more businesses coming in. Any improvements to sidewalks and streetscapes is very welcomed and will definitely make it more attractive." **WHL**

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Meet the members

Home Design District on New Park Avenue

by Lynn Woike
Editor

A group of local home improvement, home décor and construction-related businesses located in the New Park Avenue area have formed the Home Design District. Members are specialists in their fields, offering personalized service, expert advice and high-quality products. They average more than 20 years in business. Located within one square mile, all businesses have convenient parking and are ready to meet your needs. **WHL**

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586 New Park Avenue
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860-231-1576
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This family owned chain retailer specializes in flooring, including carpet, hardwood, laminate, ceramic tiles and rugs.

Heat and fuel

2 Barrieau & O'Toole Company
94 Reed Avenue
860-953-6111
barrieauoil.com
This full-service fuel oil company provides licensed and insured plumbing, heating, and air conditioning contractors. Jobs include bathroom remodels, installing a new heating system or air conditioning system, putting gas logs in a fireplace or installing a new sump pump.

Home exteriors

3 Bartlett Brainard Products
75 Talcott Road
860-233-4475
bartlettbrainard.com
Hours: Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and by appointment
This family owned company is a professional exterior home remodeling firm, operating since 1937. Its showroom includes samples of windows, doors, siding and roofing.

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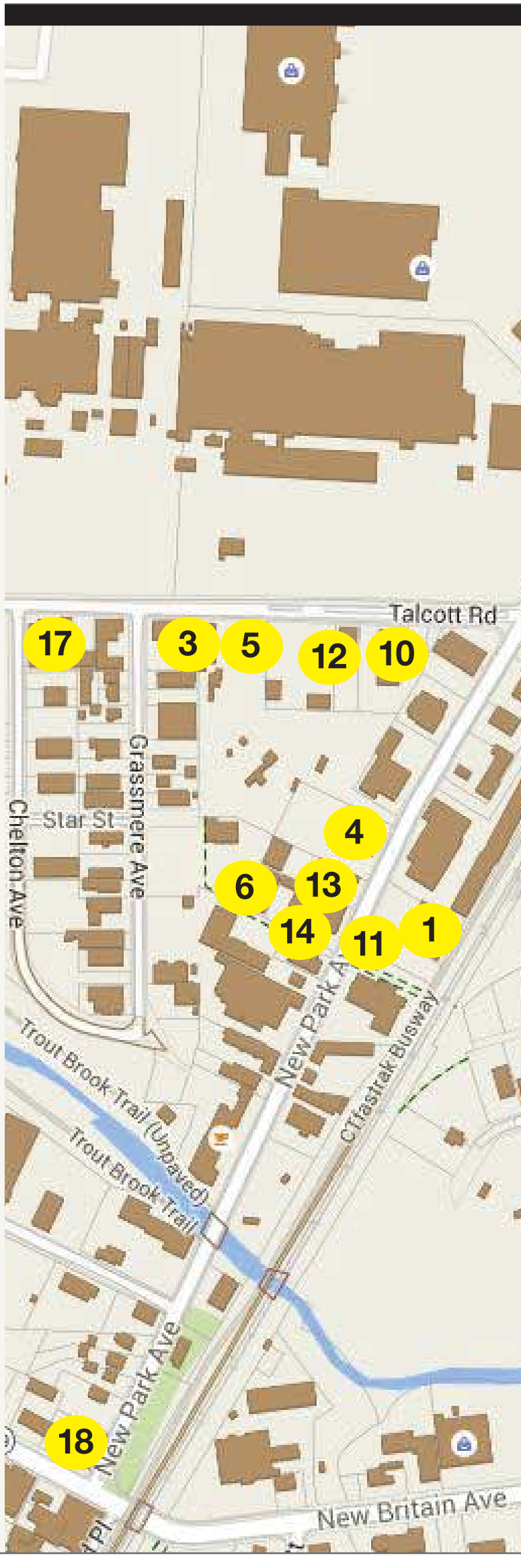

HOME *design* DISTRICT

8 Custom Framing Depot

485 New Park Avenue
860-236-0800, customframingdepot.com
Hours: Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Marvin Janow's Custom Framing Depot is a full-service shop with all work done on the premises. It offers style, selection and service for all your arts, prints and certificates.

9 Raymour and Flanigan

490 New Park Avenue
860-586-8223, raymourflanigan.com
Hours: Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sunday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
The store carries a huge selection furniture and home décor to fill any room or home with style, from classic to contemporary and everything in between. It also sells mattresses, area rugs and more, and offers design tips.

Kitchen and bath

10 CT Shower and Bath

555 New Park Avenue
860-236-6500, ctshowerandbath.com
Hours: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursdays to 7 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
CT Shower and Bath will measure, design, make and professionally install custom and stock enclosures to fit any tub or shower. Collaborating with the customer, or a chosen contractor, it can provide a turnkey bath remodel.

11 Holland Kitchens

590 New Park Avenue
860-236-3111, hollandkitchens.com
Hours: Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4p.m.
Award-winning designers and craftsman will create a kitchen or bath beyond your dreams. Talent and experience can deal with everything from flooring to ceiling, from problem kitchens to tight budgets. Showroom features latest trends.

Services

12 Daley Moving & Storage Inc.

39 Talcott Road
860-216-6060, daleymoving.com
This family owned company offers long distance, local, international and commercial moving, packing, storage, decluttering and debris removal – as well as record storage – at affordable prices. Packing supplies are also sold.

Tile and stone

13 Surfaces in Stone

585 New Park Avenue
860-231-8356, tileamerica.com
Hours: Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and by appointment
Surfaces in Stone is a fabricator and installer of natural stone countertops, vanity tops, fireplace surrounds and other custom pieces. Select from granite, marble and limestone in the warehouse, and kitchen and vanity displays in the showroom.

14 Tile America West Hartford

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Hours: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. on Thursday; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Visit the showroom for a huge selection of ceramic, porcelain, glass, metal and stone tile – along with free design assistance. There's also a warehouse, outlet clearance center, and the granite and marble fabrication facility called Surfaces in Stone.

Tools and supplies

15 Coastal Tool & Supply

510 New Park Avenue
860-233-8213, coastaltool.com
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16 The Ultimate Bath Store

705 Oakwood Avenue
860-297-7705, ultimatebathsotre.com
Hours: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursdays until 8; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
The exclusive showroom offers contractors and homeowners everything to create the ideal bath or kitchen. High quality brands and up-to-date products fit any budget.

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17 Market Solutions Unlimited

109 Talcott Road
msudirectmail.com, (860) 523-0670
The woman-owed business provides all your end-to-end, direct mail and print solutions. Projects – from annual reports to variable data mailings – are delivered accurately, on time and on budget.

18 The Corner Pug

1046 New Britain Avenue
860-231-0241, cornerpug.com
Hours: Daily from 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. – 2 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights
Directly across from the Elmwood CTfastrak station, this pub with an English feel offers 12 beers on tap, comfort food, late-night bites, Sunday brunch and daily specials. The whole family is welcome.

Primary source: homedesigndistrict.com

HOME *design* DISTRICT

Gifts for your home

You buy presents for your children, your parents, your spouse, your co-workers and friends. But what about your home? It deserves some love and attention. We asked these Home Design District members to suggest a wonderful gift you can buy for your home that you, too, will enjoy.

"Take something that feels old and give it a new twist by refreshing it with new matting. By attracting attention to a new color scheme, you can inexpensively 'stage' your room in a fun new way and give your home a new look." –*Laurel Janow Larco, manager, Custom Framing Depot*

"The most curb appeal that you can buy for your house is a portico – this is a roof over your front door. It adds a lot of class." –*Cathy Davis, owner and president, Bartlett Brainard Products*

"Update your kitchen with a backsplash. Whatever your taste – tile, mirror, marble, metal, glass or stone – it will not only protect your walls but will be a focal point in a busy room." –*Alexi Dahlstrom, marketing director for Dalene Flooring Carpet One*

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–Rob Ludgin, owner, Coastal Tool and Supply

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–Ruth Terray, owner, Budget Blinds of West Hartford

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"A great gift for the home would be blinds that keep the inside in and the outside out. They allow what happens at home to stay at home."
–Jerry Reed, owner, Joe Cornfield's Wallpaper and Window Treatments

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Arts calendar

Hall High School's Pops 'n Jazz concert featuring the school's jazz bands, dancers and singers March 11, 12, 17, 18 and 19, 7:30 p.m., 975 North Main Street, hallhighjazz.com

At the Mandell JCC, 335 Bloomfield Avenue:

- Youth Theater Production of "Beauty and the Beast Jr." March 12, 13 and 17 at 7 p.m. and March 20 at 2 p.m.
- Jewish Book Festival – Shulem Deen's "All Who Go Do Not Return" March 13, 7 p.m. – One man's moving and revealing account of growing up Hasidic, and his harrowing struggles with his loss of faith, family and community.
- "Everything Is Green" exhibit of Elsie Kagan's work at the Chase Family Gallery on display through March 20. Her recent work draws from both 17th Century Northern European painting and live observation, fusing the form of familiar, older works with an attention to paint's materiality; looking for both pictoral space and surface 'presence,' without sacrificing either. Her work describes the way stems of a plant refract in water, and also how gravity pulls color down a surface, seeking that charged moment when paint is both a smear and a cluster of blossoms.
- 20th annual Mandell JCC Jewish Film Festival March 31 to April 10 – Israeli singer-songwriter David Broza will appear on opening night with a live appearance at the premiere of his new rockumentary "East Jerusalem, West Jerusalem." The festival continues through April 10 with 22 international first-run films featuring Tony winning actor Jonathan Pryce, Nobel Prize Laureates Isaac Bashevis Singer and Yitzchak Rabin, Massachusetts painters Jill Hoy and Jon Imber, Israel's "Wonder Woman" Gal Gadot, New York actress Sas Goldberg and Philadelphia's Zahav Restaurant chef Michael Solomonov. On closing night, there will be a sneak preview of Professor Sam Kassow's upcoming Warsaw Ghetto documentary. Visit www.hjff.org for a full schedule and to buy tickets

The Hartt Choir presents "Carmina Burana" Thursday April 21, 7:30-9:30 p.m., the Lincoln Theater at the University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue – The Hartt School Choruses and Hartt Percussion Ensemble welcome the Connecticut Children's Chorus, the New Haven Chorale and singers from Manchester Community College for a gala performance of Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana."

At Playhouse on Park, 244 Park Rd:

- Stop/time dance theater's "Superstition" March 30 to April 10 explores the world of black cats, pinky swears, ladders and sidewalk cracks as stop/time presents its annual music and dance extravaganza
- "Wit" April 20 to May 8, Margaret Edson's Pulitzer Prize–winning play examines what makes life worth living through her exploration of one of existence's unifying experiences – mortality – while she also probes the importance of human relationships. "Wit" follows a brilliant and exacting poetry professor as she undergoes an experimental treatment for cancer.

At the West Hartford Art League, 37 Buena Vista Road:

- Artbeat 2016 March 9to April 3 features work from students in West Hartford's public schools
- CT+6 April 24 to June 5 – a juried exhibit open to artists in the five New England states and New York

At the University of Saint Joseph's Hoffman Auditorium, 1678 Asylum Avenue:

- 11th annual Saint Patrick's Celebration Concert March 13, 2:30 p.m. - Ringrose, Freeman & Friends, featuring All-Ireland Champion John Whelan, play traditional Irish music of the hearth and pub, plus dancers from the Griffith Irish Dance Academy. Come early for an Irish brunch and a Guinness.
- Exit 12 Dance Company/"The Odyssey" April 16 at 7 p.m. and April 17 at 2 p.m. – "The Odyssey" draws upon the works of Romare Bearden, Gil Scott Heron, and Homer to depict a veteran's journey home. Exit 12, a nationally celebrated military veteran dance company, will perform this work-in-progress after a week-long developmental residency at USJ.
- From Refugee Camp to Project April 22, 7:30 p.m. – Cambodian refugee *Sokeo Ros* takes the audience on his journey from Asia to America, from housing projects to artistic projects, culminating in a return to the Cambodian village his family was driven from in the 1970s.
- Dance Ensemble Spring Show April 23, 7:30 p.m. – an evening showcasing work choreographed by students and guest artists
- "Trash Dance" screening April 26, 7 p.m. - A documentary about a unique partnership between an Austin arts organization and the City of Austin Solid Waste Services Department, featuring 24 employees and 16 large sanitation vehicles.
- The Ballet Theatre Company's Spring Repertory Performance 2016 May 14, 1 and 7 p.m., Hoffman Auditorium at the University of Saint Joseph, 1678 Asylum Avenue – featuring new ballet "Speranza," about a young girl who discovers a magical box that transports her into a world of magic and illusion; "Abravanel," a modern dance that relates the historic struggles, music and journey of Sephardic Jews; and the wedding scene from "Don Quixote." **WHL**

SPRING *arts*

Photos by Alison Jalbert

Line and color

Sandy Chase has a style all her own

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

For West Hartford artist Sandy Chase, it all starts with an eye.

When starting one of her pen-and-ink drawings, she sketches out an eye similar to one found in the Mona Lisa, but morphed slightly.

"I love to draw that. It's a great starting point," she said.

From there, she has no plan as to how the rest of the drawing will turn out. Chase lets her emotions and thoughts dictate where her pen goes. One recent piece includes a set of teeth among other parts of the drawing, representing her anxiety over an upcoming dentist appointment.

"When I'm a little anxious or nervous, I sit down and do that. It's really a glorified doodle," she said.

Chase works with pen and ink on paper with watercolor paint accents, sometimes using a bit of acrylic paint, a small area of collage or colored pencil.

"I've started to develop this style that's mine," she said. "... It's all about line and color. There's no perspective. I'm probably breaking some rules of illustration, but what the heck."

Her love for art started in her childhood; she said she always loved making things and always had a creative mind. She recalls her mother purchasing her a light box from a rummage sale, which she loved and would spend hours drawing various characters from "The Flinstones."

She obtained a degree in art education and was an art teacher for three years, something she loved.

"I loved the fact that you could be creative – before Common Core, before budget problems," Chase said.

Her teaching career came to an end when she had four children – one son and three daughters.

"There was always art supplies around the house. My fingernails were always filled with paint. My kids grew up with lots of art supplies," she recalled.

Once her children had grown and she reentered the workforce, Chase worked at a school for children with developmental disabilities, an experience that would alter her life. She said she learned more from them than they probably did from her, and decided it was time for her to really do what she wanted to do. She wanted to go back and revisit art, but this time, really immerse herself into perspective and color mixing.

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Chase started with a basic drawing class at the West Hartford Art League.

"I wasn't the best, I wasn't the worst. That made me feel OK," she said. "I took two more, then I said to myself, 'Go to the University of Hartford's art school.'"

Describing herself as "very goal oriented," she decided if she was going to take a class at UHart, spending the 16 weeks and tuition, she wanted something to show for it. She worked towards a bachelor's degree in painting and drawing, graduating in 2012.

"That's where this style came from," Chase said. "I didn't want to do landscapes – I thought that would make me look too traditional. I wanted to explore."

She wasn't done with her education yet, spending three years working towards a master's of fine arts in illustration.

A visiting artist in one of her classes once said, "Your work is much younger than you are," a comment that her younger classmates took as an insult, but Chase was flattered. She said people are often shocked when they see her work.

"They say, 'You're so conservative – what are you thinking when you make this?'" she said with a laugh. "[Art gives me] the ability to break out of what I think I should do to something that's way out of my comfort zone."

She has started to incorporate teeth into her work more, and finds herself drawing intricate pipe systems. Each piece is a "photo album of memories."

"I remember things in my life when I do my pieces; one I was working on while watching Whitney Houston's funeral on TV. I can look at one and tell you what I was wearing, where I was in life."

Chase's work has been in 16 selected group exhibits since 2010 and has won two awards: the West Hartford Art League Member Juried Show, Jerry's Artarama Award in 2015 and the Nancy Cloutier Memorial Prize from the Canton on the Green Juried Exhibit in 2012.

Along with taking many classes at the art league, Chase has also been on its board for three years. There are many reasons why she loves the WHAL, but said something she enjoys is that so many adults are coming back to art later in life.

"When they retire, they say, 'I'm going to do it.' It's wonderful to see," she said. "One thing I learned about learning is you never really know it all. Never. I don't care what field you're in – there's always something to learn. If you take a class, you're taking a class for a reason. I think it's wonderful that we have this 'second act' place for many."

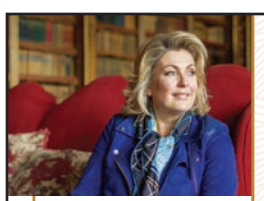
She also loves the art league's 81-year history and said if you look back, it boasted a social scene very different than what it is today.

"It's great to combine all that. Because of that, I did become a docent [at the New Britain Museum of American Art] at the same time I became a board member here. It's a way of teaching and spreading the word."

Chase thinks art is for everybody and finds it sad when people say they can't draw or can't paint.

"This isn't a place of fear," she said. "My mantra is if you just learn this much, that's more than you've learned before." **WHL**

Photos by Alison Jalbert



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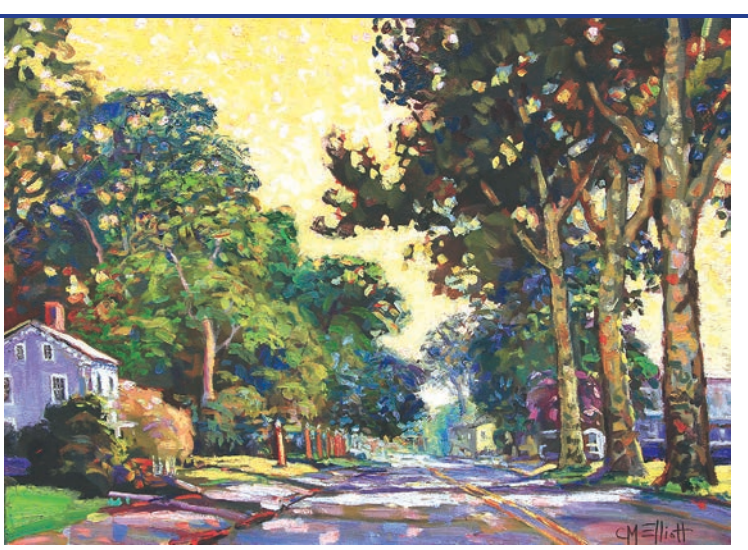

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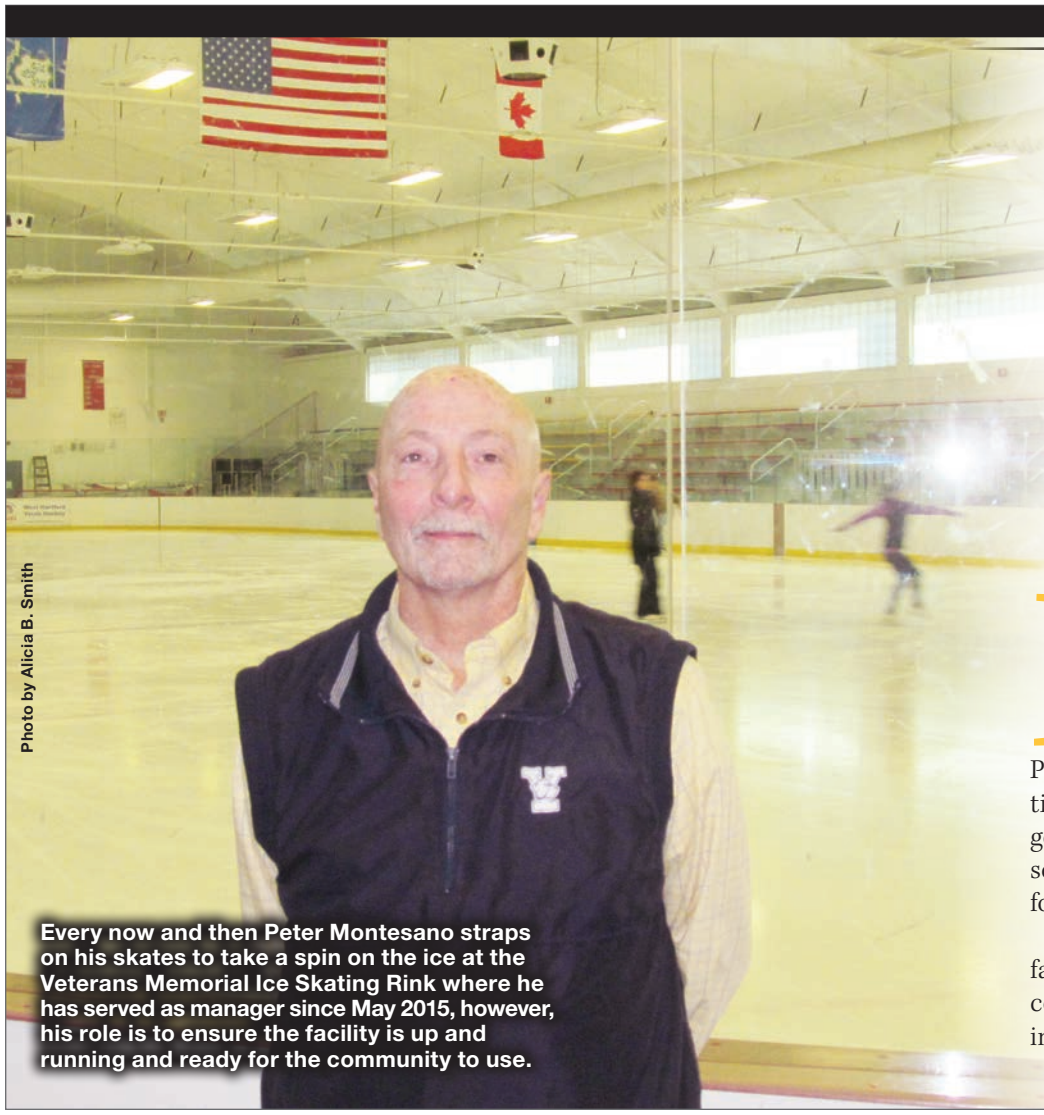

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Every now and then Peter Montesano straps on his skates to take a spin on the ice at the Veterans Memorial Ice Skating Rink where he has served as manager since May 2015, however, his role is to ensure the facility is up and running and ready for the community to use.

Getting to know you

Veterans Memorial Ice Skating Rink Manager Peter Montesano

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Life at the Veterans Memorial Ice Skating Rink is not all skating and pick-up hockey games for manager Peter Montesano. He rarely has time to strap on his skates and get out on the ice because he is so busy ensuring the ice is ready for community members.

Montesano began as the facility's director last May, coming from the Taft School in Watertown where he oversaw its two rinks for the past 10 years.

The Watertown resident and cancer survivor had decided it was time for a change and appreciates that he now has a year-round job.

Montesano's background is in management. In his 30 years in the field, he has overseen other facilities. He said when it came to the ice rinks at the school he received some on-the-job training and earned

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certifications from the industry to manage those facilities.

"I think what makes it special is it's very family orientated," he said of Veterans Memorial rink. "We have employees on staff who grew up in this building – their parents skated here and they skated here."

Montesano noted, too, that the rink is more diverse than people may realize.

"It's not just hockey," he said of a common misconception. Rather, the rink offers figure skating, speed skating and public skating sessions along with learning-to-skate programs, and it's open all year round.

Just as winter descended on the area making it feel more like skating weather, Montesano took a few minutes to chat with West Hartford LIFE about himself and his work at the rink.

How did you get into this line of work?

Good question. I've always been a big fan of hockey since the 1960s. We moved here from New Jersey to Connecticut. When my sons were old enough, they got involved in youth hockey in Watertown. At that point, being around it, I started working with them, started coaching them and coached them all the way through high school. I always had a passion for sports, coaching, working with kids and things like that. One thing lead to another and the opportunity at Taft came up, which was a good opportunity at that time in my life for me to take on that challenge and try something new.

What is an average day like for you?

Busy. On a day-to-day basis the thing we are doing here every day is putting out daily fires if need be. Some things flare up and we have to take care of things; it's overseeing the operation, checking on the building systems, customer service, working with our staff doing training and things like that. A big piece of it is also planning. Like right now we are already planning for our budget for next year, we are planning for spring and summer programs already even though we are here in January. There are a lot of administrative pieces to it.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

I would say trying to … keep everybody focused on really what the facility is all about. Trying to be fair to all the groups, our end users.

If you weren't doing this what would you be doing?

I think I would be working on a golf course somewhere in the warm weather.

What do you love about your job?

The daily challenges, I think the interactions with customers and the staff and really just trying to impart my knowledge and wisdom of what I've gained over the years, especially because we have a young staff so just trying to share knowledge and thoughts on life with them as well.

What do people think you do and how is that different from what you actually do?

I think they probably see me as the face of the rink sort of like maybe the final decision maker. But the one thing they don't see is the amount of hats that you actually wear in this position. There are so many facets of what we do here that you are basically overseeing everything.

What kinds of things do you like to do on your day off?

On my day off I like to spend time with my 4 ½-year-old grandson. Weather permitting, golfing or just reading. I like to read about history.

What are your hobbies?

Golf, travel [and] reading.

What is the best vacation you've ever taken and what made it so memorable?

Probably would be a couple of years ago my wife and I went to Europe; we went to Paris and Rome. I think just being able to see ancient architecture that we kind of take for granted but in other countries the people work and live among it every single day, especially the ancient architecture that has been around for hundreds and hundreds of years and they just go to and from work every day and it's just part of their daily life.

What was the last book you read?

"Unbroken," by Laura Hildebrand. I just think the inspiration of the story of World War II the fellow was an Olympic runner prior to the war, [he] became a prisoner of the war and used his mental toughness to survive. **WHL**

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LIVING *Your Best* LIFE

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Carolyn Levine is taking her business on the road to Florida.

No slowing down

Carolyn Levine expands her business to Florida

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Anyone who knows Carolyn Levine knows she is not about to slow down – so much so, one of her friends calls her "a tornado."

After suffering from a dissected aortic aneurysm in November 2013 that required an 11-hour surgery and extensive rehabilitation, one might think Levine would have retired, put her feet up and taken it easy. She did not. Instead she lost 30 pounds and picked up right where she left off. She has no intention of slowing down anytime soon, either.

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LIVING *Your Best* LIFE

For several years she has owned her own business – Family Connections – serving as a geriatric care manager. With her husband, Bob, retired and the couple spending increasingly more time at their condo in Florida, Levine has decided that the typical days for 70-somethings in the Sunshine State are not for her.

She and her husband routinely travel south, often spending several months at a time in Florida. Levine remains in touch with her clients in Connecticut and their families has staff on hand to oversee things in her absence.

"I decided Florida holds no challenges for me," Levine said. "There is a lot of going out to eat. I just miss my life in Connecticut. Number one, I miss my grandchildren. When I get back to Connecticut my life starts again."

The 72-year-old has decided to take her business on the road. She is hoping to take on clients – families in Connecticut who have elderly parents living in Florida. Working in the West Palm Beach/Jupiter area, Levine will use her skills to work with patients in Florida the way she would in her home state. While away she can stop in to see clients, be in contact with their families in Connecticut and be another set of eyes to ensure they are healthy and being properly taken care of when their own children are too far away to do it themselves.

"I will look in on them, do my own assessment. It's long-distance care giving for adult children who do not have an accurate way to assess how their moms and dads are doing," Levine said.

"I think it will give a level of [comfort] to adult children living in the New England area. They will know there is a professional with their moms and dads."

"It's long-distance care giving for adult children who do not have an accurate way to assess how their moms and dads are doing."

–Carolyn Levine

Levine will not only offer her company but will do routine checks to ensure that there is food in the refrigerator and that it is being eaten, that clients are taking their medication appropriately and that they are engaged in social activities. She is also available to help when an individual may be released from the hospital and sent to rehab or sent home. She can also be there to check if the client is getting to medical appointments and has some social time with others.

Levine will be in contact with family members back in Connecticut to share updates and her concerns if she has discovered something that might not be right.

"I consider my business a security blanket for elderly people," Levine said. "I would like to think I add quality on a daily basis to their life."

Levine and her husband took off for Florida around Thanksgiving time last year and by the New Year she already had some clients

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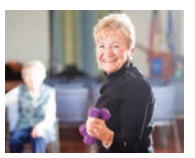

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Funerals – Celebrating a Life

Research confirms that a meaningful funeral is an important part of the grieving and healing process. What, then, is meant by a "meaningful" funeral? As we have helped families over the past several years, it's become clear that there are three key ingredients, all related to the idea of celebrating a life as part of the grieving process.

Randy Molloy, Funeral Director

First, and perhaps most important, family members need to understand that they have choices and options that might not have occurred to them without guidance. In years past, funeral and memorial services followed traditional forms, usually centering on the person's religious tradition and customs. Today there are as many different ways to celebrate a life as there are individuals. Families have the freedom to choose how to arrange a service to their own needs.

Second, the idea of celebrating a life leads to many creative ways to organize services and tributes. Focusing on the loved one's interests, hobbies, career and passions can lead to a more relaxed and healing atmosphere. Memorial displays, videos, mementos and even the seating arrangement, can foster interaction and sharing among those wishing to pay their respects. Even humor has found its way into today's funeral service as families remember the good times and special moments in their shared experience.

Third, funeral directors not only have the family's needs in mind, but they have both the experience and the training to help families create a meaningful service. From training in the grieving process to "celebrant" training, funeral directors will work hard to develop, organize and facilitate a service that best meets the needs and resources of the family.

Shauna Molloy, Funeral Director

These options and freedoms expressed in today's funeral service can help families manage their grief and move toward healthful healing for themselves, their friends and loved ones.

Randy Molloy and Shauna Molloy are funeral directors with the Molloy Funeral Home.

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LIVING *Your Best* LIFE

"I consider my business a security blanket for elderly people."

–Carolyn Levine

"This job is a passion of caring more than a job."

–Bob Levine

in her home away from home as word about her work has gotten out. She has met with some adult children and their parents and done an assessment.

As Valentine's Day approached, Levine had a client visit scheduled for the following week.

"I'm just energized, getting back into the swing of things here," she said.

"It's been fine."

Levine keeps in touch with her three staff members working in West Hartford, talking to them typically three times a day. If there are any issues with a client in Connecticut, she will call them to check in herself.

"I feel very much in touch with them," she said.

Levine likes to be active; she said it's a trait she inherited from her mother.

"I don't do well with down time," Levine admitted.

While she often spends time with friends while in Florida and enjoys their company, Levine said by the end of the day of visiting she often feels that she has not accomplished anything and that's a feeling she does not like.

"It's a matter of some form of fulfillment," said Bob Levine.

"I think that's what got me better, on my feet again, after an 11-hour surgery – I was thinking of the clients and all I have yet to accomplish," Levine said of her health scare a few years ago.

Levine and her husband will be traveling back and forth from Florida to West Hartford and have no concern about the toll it will take. The two are always up for spending time with their four grandchildren.

"In retirement years I feel people should be doing what they want to do," Bob Levine said. "I think that is very important."

Bob said he intends to spend his time in Florida pursuing more traditional retirement endeavors such as playing golf and tennis. This way, he said, he and his wife can get back together at the end of the day and share with one another how they spent their time.

Levine attributes regaining her health to the care and support she received from her husband of 48 years.

"It took that emergency for me to 100 percent appreciate what a good relationship was all about," Levine said. "He's been my sidekick, I couldn't have made it without him. I think now I have a new appreciation for each day and it has to have meaning."

"This job is a passion of caring more than a job," Bob Levine said of his wife's work.

"Bob is right, this is a passion," Levine said.

"Carolyn always has to be doing something," Bob Levine said. "Her nature is not to sit still." WHL

For more information on Family Connections, call Carolyn Levine at 860-748-7348 or 860-236-3700.

LIVING *Your Best* LIFE

LIFE stopped in at the senior center and asked:

"What advice would you give your 30-year-old self?"

"Turn more to seniors for advice."
– James Diamond, 66, West Hartford

"Be smart. Don't be so quick to rush into things without thinking things through. There are complications that will arise in anything that you go into in life."
– Nanci Wylde, 55, West Hartford

"Don't make the same mistakes."
– Rob Stavnezer, 72, West Hartford

"Don't sweat the small stuff; just let it go. Don't worry about things. If you have your health, you've got everything."
– Anne Fitzpatrick, 57, West Hartford

"What's surprised you the most about the aging process?"

the seniors had this to say:

"When I was 20, everyone would listen to what I said, but I knew nothing. Today, I know, but ain't nobody listening."
– James Diamond, 66, West Hartford

"I'm loving my aging process. I feel better about myself now as a 55-year-old woman than I have at any other time in my life."
– Nanci Wylde, 55, West Hartford

"Nothing really has surprised me as much as your body changes but your mind doesn't. My brain and thinking process is just as sharp as it always was. Your brain doesn't get old. The Veterans Administration in Newington and West Haven have helped me greatly."
– Rob Stavnezer, 72, West Hartford

"It's easier than I thought. I exercise. I walk. I eat healthy. So, that's probably why I don't feel my age at all."
– Anne Fitzpatrick, 57, West Hartford

"You have to learn to accept limitations. Things change. You have to go with it. Keep your sense of humor."
– Susan Fellman, 75, West Hartford

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A snowstorm and excitement

The Bridge Family Center's 17th Annual Children's Charity Ball is a success

On January 23, 2016, the Bridge Family Center hosted its 17th annual gala, the Children's Charity Ball, at the Hartford Golf Club. Despite a snowstorm, 335 of the 365 registered guests attended. A peacock theme — Show Your True Colors — provided an elegant environment. The evening featured a black tie cocktail reception, sit-down dinner, live and silent auctions, and dancing to the music of the popular Timmy Maia Band. Matt Winter and Jane Lehman, Allstate Insurance Company, were the Honorary Chairs for the second consecutive year. Scot Haney, Channel 3 Meteorologist/Co-host of "Better Connecticut," was the spirited and entertaining emcee for the 15th year in a row.

"Once again, our community was incredibly generous," according to The Bridge. "The entire event with ticket sales, silent and live auctions, Restaurant Row, Grab and Go, a raffle of seven beautiful peacock-themed baskets, and the Changing Lives Challenge netted more than $250,000 for Bridge services for children and families in West Hartford, the Greater Hartford area and beyond. The Bridge is grateful to an incredible group of women who spent months planning the gala; to hundreds of businesses and individuals who sponsored the event or donated items to the silent and live auctions; to many individuals who made monetary donations to support the ball; to our team of gala volunteers; and to our guests for the evening."

The Children's Charity Ball Committee members, who worked for five months to put on the gala, pose for the camera at the beginning of the evening.

Bill Schappert and Kate Hann; Margaret Hann, Bridge executive director; Bill Hann.

Bill Healey; Peter Gutermann, vice President, global ethics and compliance Officer at UTC, the Galaxy Sponsor of the ball; Paul Butler, a Platinum Sponsor of the ball.

Members of the ball committee dance the night away: Paula Stabnick; Sue Healey; Mary Ellen Flege; and Mary Butler, Bridge board president and Platinum Sponsor of the ball.

John Bierly, a Platinum Sponsor of the Ball, greets Emcee Scot Haney, Channel 3, who entertained guests for the 15th year in a row.

Standing (from left): Honorary Chairs Matt Winter and Jane Lehman, Allstate Insurance Company; Trish and Art Schaller; Jill Barden; Scott Blume. (Sitting from left) Paul and Kim Cullen; Vanessa and David Gonzalez; Michael and Brandi Skaling.

West Hartford firefighters and their wives: Standing (from left) John Griffin, Dan and Rachel Syme, Brandi and Troy Shipley. Sitting (from left) Corinne Griffin, Melanie and Kerry Warren, Shannon and Kevin Munson.

Guests raise their paddles to bid in the Changing Lives Challenge to support Bridge programs for children and families.

Isabella and Dan O'Brien enjoy the evening.

Courtesy photos

The Bridge Family Center

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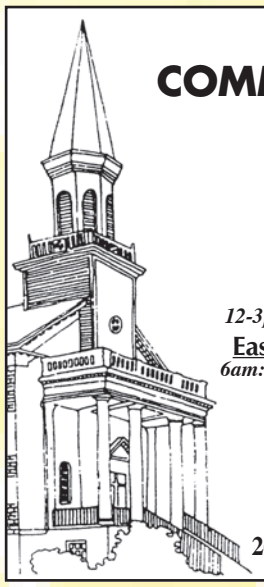

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10am: *Worship*

Maundy Thursday (March 24th)
7pm: *Tenebrae Service & Communion*

Good Friday (March 25th)
12-3pm: *Silent Prayer & Vigil - All Welcome!*

Easter Sunrise Service (March 27th)
6am: *Sunrise Service in the Memorial Garden*

Easter Sunday (March 27th)
10am*: Easter Worship*

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at Our Savior Lutheran Church

GOOD FRIDAY LITURGY
March 25, Noon

EASTER VIGIL SERVICE
March 26th, 7 pm

EASTER DAY HOLY EUCHARIST
March 27th, 9 am

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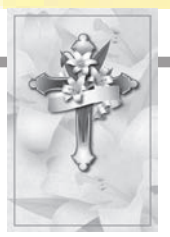

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– Good Friday –
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– Easter –
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- Come to an evening Taizé or Celtic service.
- Manantial de Gracia worships every Sunday at 11 a.m.
- Palm Sunday (March 20th) includes a Family Lenten Event & Lunch at 11:30 a.m.
- Easter Sunday (March 27th) starts with a Sunrise Service on the lawn at 6:30 a.m.; Worship and music at 10 a.m.; Easter Egg Hunt at 11:15 a.m.

Coming this Spring & Summer:

- "Spring Fling Swing Dance & Dinner" with The Little Big Band, April 8th at 6 p.m.($20 suggested donation.)
- Community Labyrinth Walk on May 7th .
- High School Youth Group mission trip to Washington, D.C. in June.
- Vacation Bible School, July 11-15th.

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Photo by Mara Dresner

Ida Levy was born in Vienna and lived in Greece, where she met her late husband, Henry. They lived in West Hartford for many years before retiring to Florida. After Henry's death, Ida returned to town. She holds a photo of her parents, brother and sister.

Surviving the Holocaust

Ida Levy makes her way from Vienna to West Hartford

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

The fact that Ida Levy speaks eights languages – including Spanish, French, Italian and Yiddish – is a clue to her complicated background. She was born in Vienna. Her father, who worked in a chocolate factory, was born in Turkey; her mother was born in Poland; she's not quite sure how the two met.

The family was thrown into disarray when Hitler came to power.

"I was 7 years old when Hitler came into Vienna," said Levy, who turns 88 in April. "I was a kid."

Her family moved to Greece, where her younger brother was killed. Levy was sent to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. Her father, then 72, also survived the camps, as did her other brother. Her mother did not.

"I worked hard. I cut shoes and I found diamonds. Can you eat diamonds? I ate pork; that's all I ate. I never ate pork; my parents were kosher," Levy remembered. "The Polish people, they were like the Nazis. I was just a kid. They used to count us in the morning, like 2 o'clock in the morning. I was a rascal. They would say, 'Why you come so late?' I was sleeping; I was tired. I would speak German. If I'm liberated, I'm going to pay you back. They were terrible. It was hard, it was hard."

Once liberated from the camps, where she knew Anne Frank, Levy returned to Greece.

"When I came back, I was 13, 14. I was there several years, I went to Greece. I didn't want to go to Vienna. I went to Greece and met my husband," she said.

Levy married Henry, a Greek man who had been in Auschwitz.

"I got married when I was 16 years old; I was young. My husband lost his entire family, 10 people. He was the only survivor, He never had a bar mitzvah. He had a bar mitzvah with my grandson; can you believe it?" Levy said.

"I'm reading the paper and President Truman said all the Jewish people can come to the United States, all the survivors. I think President Truman was the best president. I ran to the embassy. I was young and we came here. I was 20 years old with my husband and a baby, a year old. My husband was in the army, he said, 'How do you do this?' In one month we were in the United States. I couldn't speak a word of English, not one word. It was tough. Then I brought my father and my brother here. I'm the only [one] left from my family, I'm the only [one] left. I'm sorry, it's not easy," she said, her eyes filling with tears.

She was so thin at the time that she looked much younger than her years.

"Two rabbis in Greece asked me if I was 10 years old. I was skinny like this," she said, holding her hands close together.

The couple was settled in Connecticut by the Jewish Federation, explained Levy, who said she taught herself English.

She and Henry were married for 65 years until he died from cancer two years ago. They had three children, Esther (Tafrizi), Joseph and Ann (McCarthy), nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Ida Levy still has her documents from when she immigrated to the United States at the age of 20.

At first, living in Hartford was no picnic.

"It was tough, tough. They didn't want to rent me a room. I lived across from the jail. I had one room on the fifth floor. I had no oil. I had to schlep the oil upstairs. I was young, I was 20 years old. Then I brought my father and my brother," she said. "My husband worked in G. Fox in the pharmacy in the beginning, then we had an office across from Crown Market. We used to send packages to Russia. We couldn't speak Russian, so what do you do? We hired two secretaries. One day, one comes in, and said, 'If you're Jews, I'm not going to send a package, I throw out.' I said, 'You see the doors? I throw [you] out.' I was liberated with the Russians. I didn't know they were anti-Semites," said Levy who remembers shopping at Crown Market while it was still in Hartford.

The family later moved to West Hartford, near the Emanuel Synagogue where they were longtime members.

"Ida was a homemaker, and she helped my father in the export business in Hartford. She ran the house and made sure there was always a home-cooked meal ready for her family and any other visitors. She opened her home to visitors from all around the world. The cantor of their small congregation who came from Israel every year to conduct Sephardic services for the high holidays stayed with my parents. No one ever left hungry from her house," remembered Joseph Levy, who grew up in West Hartford and now lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Helayne Levy, who also grew up in town.

"My father was the president for approximately 25 years of the Sephardic Congregation of Hartford. It was a group of Sephardic Jews comprised of approximately 50 families who came from Massachusetts, New York and throughout Connecticut only for the high holidays as they hired a cantor from Israel to lead their services," he said.

In addition to crafts such as embroidery, Ida Levy has always enjoyed cooking, and is still sharing the food she makes.

"My mother loves to cook for her family and friends. She is known by all for her Greek cookies and Jewish recipes," said McCarthy, a Farmington resident.

Through the years, Henry Levy often spoke of his experiences in the Holocaust, while Ida was more reticent.

"He shared many stories with the grandchildren, trying to keep the experience alive. It was more difficult for my mom to share when we were younger. My father spoke at my children's school, synagogue, frequently at the University of Hartford and other organizations," McCarthy said.

"She prefers not to speak about the Holocaust. My father was more conversant about his experiences and spent quite a bit of time in his retirement years lecturing and writing about his Holocaust experiences. He was very active in the University of Hartford's Center for Jewish Studies. There are video archives there about their experience during the Holocaust. There are also video interviews of both of them at the Steven Spielberg Shoah project," Joseph Levy added.

"Henry Levy was a long-time member of the Board of Visitors of the

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Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies. He established at the center and was a big supporter of our work on Sephardic Judaism in the center. We recently filmed an entire interview about Henry Levy's experience in the Holocaust with his son. He was a unique voice for the untold stories of Sephardic Jews who were also subjected to the extermination camps of Poland," said professor Richard Freund, director of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at University of Hartford, said.

Ida Levy remembers going to the White House a number of years ago for a gathering of Holocaust survivors.

"I had to sign a book in the White House," she said noting that among the thousands of signatures, there weren't any others from Greece. "I was much younger. It was something for me. I stayed one week in Washington. I never forget this. I loved the White House. It was something."

She has always loved to travel and has been to Israel 13 times. Once, years ago, she and her husband were bringing in two large kosher salamis, as well as items such as sugar and coffee, for a cousin of her husband's.

"I'm reading the paper and President Truman said all the Jewish people can come to the United States, all the survivors. I ran to the embassy. ... In one month we were in the United States."

–Ida Levy

The customs agent was suspicious.

"They asked me at the airport if I had any family [in Israel]. I said I had six sisters and six brothers," Levy said, chuckling. "I never forget it."

The couple retired to Boynton Beach, Florida, where they adjusted to their new life.

"My mom is very social and enjoys talking with people. She loves telling her life story. Her greatest joy in life was taking care of her husband and children. It was a difficult time when my father was sick and passed away. She took incredible care of him throughout his illness," said McCarthy, who described her mother as "caring, loving, compassionate and proud."

"She is extremely proud of her family and will tell anyone how many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren she has," she added.

Three years ago, she moved back to Connecticut to live at SummerWood.

"I didn't want to stay [in Florida] when my husband passed away," Levy said.

She sometimes has a difficult time.

"It's sad alone; I'm here alone. I cry too much. That's why I wear glasses," she said.

Still, she's made many friends.

"I got people here 105 years old, 102, 99. They call me, 'baby,'" she said and then laughed.

"She can approach anyone and engage in conversation. She is very pleasant and always very kind to anyone she encounters. She knows all the staff where she lives and speaks to them in their native language. No one ever forgets her once they meet her. They are always amazed at how young she looks," Joe Levy said.

Valerie Bartos, director of community relations at SummerWood, noted that Levy quickly acclimated to her new home.

"She is a baker; she loves to bake. She bakes for the staff; she always tries to give goodies to the staff. She routinely volunteers here at SummerWood with various projects, collating materials for other residents or an activity program. She's always eager to help, and she's very kind and gentle and loving. For people who need a little help, she's there to help get a jacket on, to help get someone a drink, she's that kind of a person," Bartos said. "She's very friendly and welcoming. She'll tell [newcomers] they're going to love it here. She has a very active social life. She's always been a beautiful woman and she still is." WHL

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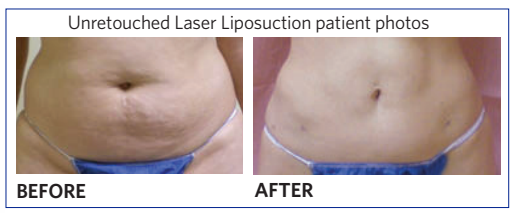

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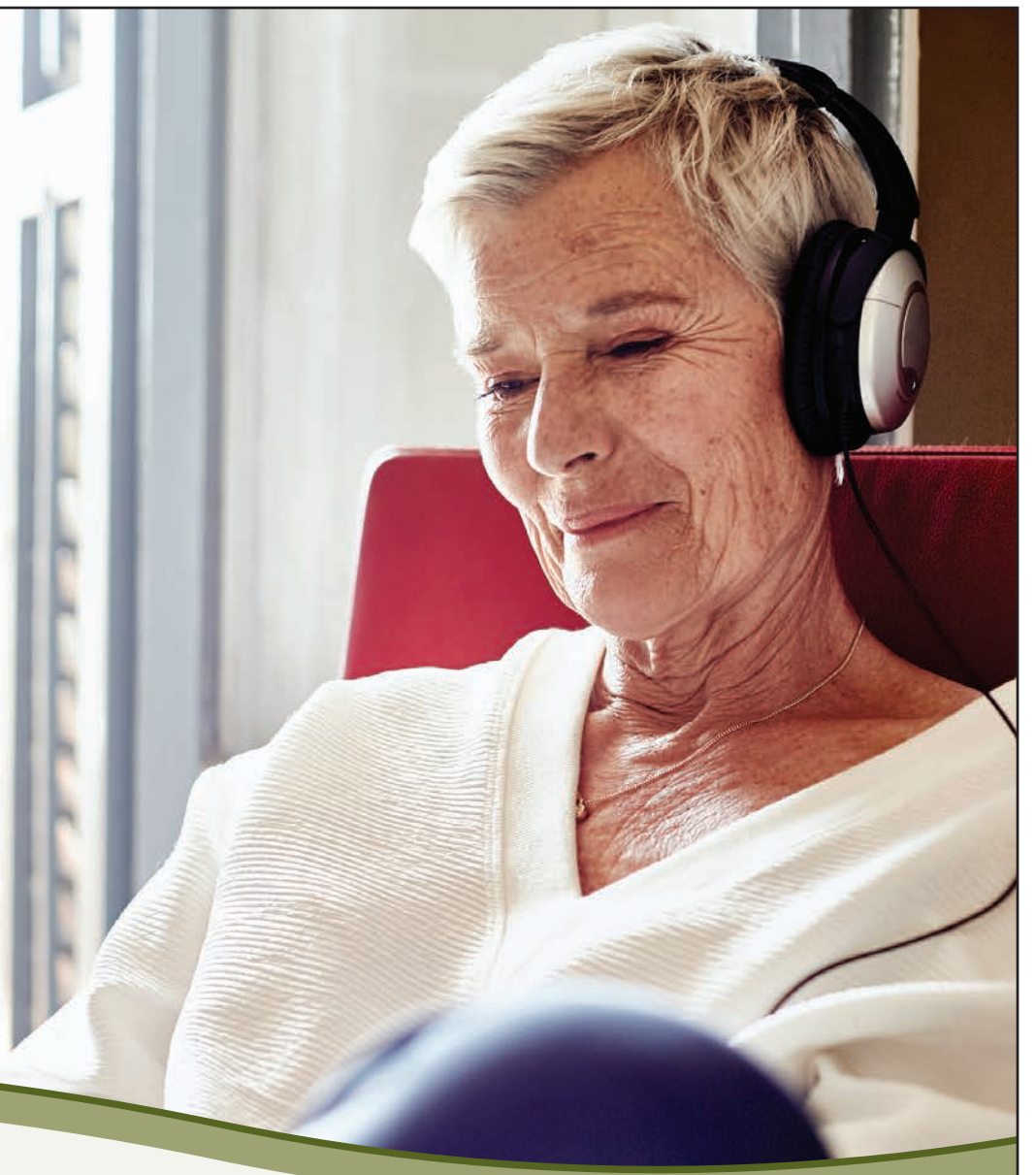

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by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

At the end of the day, Animal Control Officer Karen Jones goes home to an English Mastiff/Anatolian Shepherd mix, weighing in at 120 pounds, and a white terrier that runs about 12 pounds.

"I didn't think I was the small dog type; he wormed his way into my heart," she said of her pint-size pal that she adopted from the town's dog pound. It's a danger of the job: meeting and falling in love with the animals in her care.

There would be no way for Jones to take in all the dogs and cats she works with, but she does have fun getting to know them and ultimately seeing them find good homes with new families.

Jones is a 21-year veteran of the West Hartford Police Department, having always worked in the animal control division where she serves as supervisor along with fellow ACO Helen Lee.

Together, the two women hold down the fort at the pound located in Elmwood where they also have help from a part-time worker who assists with cleaning kennels and walking the dogs. It's a small building with an office and kennels in the back. Most of the guests are of the canine variety, but now and then a feline friend will move in for a while.

On a brisk winter day, Jones allowed West Hartford LIFE to join her for a shift.

"It's about finding them the right home," she said about the future of the animals in her care.

Those interested in meeting the animals up for adoption from the West Hartford Animal Control can find information at petfinder.com or adoptapet.com or by sending an email to animalcontrol@westhartfordct.gov. WHL

After meeting with her shift supervisor, Karen Jones had to spend a few minutes on this frosty, winter morning scraping the windshield of the van that is part mobile office.

After receiving a call for a roaming dog in the Albany Avenue and Steele Road area, Jones drives through the neighborhood to look for it.

Jones had no luck finding the roaming dog, but did find this happy fella when she got back to her office at the dog pound. The dog was left at the pound when its owner was arrested.

Jones checks her email and voicemail. "You have to market these guys. You are competing with everybody to find them homes," she said of animal rescues.

Jones introduces kittens to their temporary home. "Some think it's a shelter job where you take care of animals, others think it's as law enforcement job. It's both."

Christina and Lydia Griffin stop by with their parents to donate treats. After seeing the kittens, the girls lobbied their parents to adopt one.

ACO Helen Lee arrives at the pound for her shift after spending time at the police station. She and Jones catch up on what work needs to be done, including placing an ad for a dog.

Before leaving for the day, Jones assists Lee to give a dog eye drops while they try to find its owners. "You are trying to win their trust over," Jones said of the animals in her care. "It takes a lot of time."

Photos by Alicia B. Smith

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News and business notes

Public Internet for the Center to be explored

The Town Council passed a resolution at its February 9 meeting directing Town Manager Ron Van Winkle to evaluate opportunities, technical potential, need and cost of installing state-of-the-art, high-speed public wireless Internet service in West Hartford Center.

The eventual goal would be to create similar Wi-Fi hot spots across town.

"Widely accessible, high-speed Internet service through public wireless Internet hot spots has been a valuable and almost necessary service that is often needed for successful commercial development," the resolution explained.

Town sells bond at historically low interest rate

The town sold bonds in February at what Town Manager Ron Van Winkle said is one of the lowest rates seen in decades. The $14 million in bonds received seven bids, with the lowest coming from Morgan Stanley. The interest rate was 2.029 percent. The lower-than-expected rate will beneficially impact the debt service line item in the town budget, he said.

International high school shows interest in UConn site

Weiming Education Group, China's largest private school provider, has expressed an interest in the University of Connecticut campus in town.

A letter submitted February 17 to Mayor Scott Slifka and Town Manager Ron Van Winkle by Weiming Education Group USA Chief Executive Officer Tim DiScipio details the group's interest in "potentially acquiring" the site for use as a private international high school.

The proposal is one of many the town will consider should it decide to purchase the property, negotiations for which are currently ongoing.

"Our interest in acquiring the University of Connecticut property is to establish an international high school academy serving American, Asian, European and South American students who will board and receive instruction on the campus," the letter reads.

Weiming's interest in the UConn site was piqued by the academic reputation of West Hartford and the state of Connecticut, the letter explains, noting "the significant talent pool of teachers and administrators with advanced degrees" as an important factor. Weiming Education Group is a for-profit entity that would pay property taxes in town. The school would also hire faculty and staff from the local region.

Hearing set on ordinance change in Central Business Zone

The Town Council will hold a public hearing next month on an ordinance allowing increased density in West Hartford Center. The ordinance permitting increased density in the Central Business Zone is set for a public hearing March 22 at 7:15 p.m. in the council chambers.

According to the ordinance, the change has been proposed due to continued interest in commercial development opportunities in the Center, which caused the town to re-evaluate current limitations. If the ordinance is approved, the height of buildings in the BC zone could be increased to five stories and the maximum lot coverage of all buildings could be increased to the area remaining after provisions for yard and parking are met.

All changes would be subject to council approval, provided adequate parking and street capacity is deemed available, as are appropriate bicycle and pedestrian amenities.

Concerns with MDC deal continue

West Hartford officials are continuing to discuss how to avoid resident upset in the future after a recent rise in concerns related to a bottling plant slated to be built in Bloomfield.

Concerns with how a Niagara Bottling plant coming to Bloomfield may impact MDC member towns, including West Hartford, surfaced last month at a regular Town Council meeting.

The Town of Bloomfield recently approved a $4.1 million tax abatement for California-based Niagara Bottling, which plans to bottle water at a Bloomfield plant for sale. Since the approval, a petition launched by BloomfieldCitizens.org arguing that "Niagara Bottling is wrong for Bloomfield and all MDC towns" has garnered hundreds of signatures. Water for the plant, which could have a maximum use of 1.8 million gallons of water per day, will be purchased by Niagara Bottling from the MDC at a reduced rate.

Labrazel Home closing storefront, shifting focus

Lauren Zeligson, owner of Labrazel Home on LaSalle Road, announced at the beginning of February that she will close her retail storefront at the end of April. She has her own brand, Labrazel, that she sells wholesale and online, which is where she will be shifting her focus. Zeligson's husband, Brad, runs the wholesale business from office space above her former storefront on Farmington Avenue, and he will continue to do so while she joins him in building the website portion of the business, LabrazelHome.com. **WHL**

For up to date news, read our weekly sister publication The West Hartford Press.

LIFE *in the kitchen*

with Kim Eardley of NoRA Cupcake Company

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Photos by Abigail Albair

NoRA Cupcake Company Bakery and Catering Director Kim Eardley poses in the Middletown bakery with some of the shop's eclectic decor and a plate of its unique cupcake selections. NoRA recently opened a second location in Blue Back Square.

Kim Eardley never expected to make a career for herself as a baker.

Before NoRA Cupcake Company opened in Middletown, she was waitressing at Eli Cannon's Tap Room and studying philosophy at Western New England University while planning on applying to law school.

At the end of 2011, Eli's bartender and manager Carrie Carella and her initial partner Phil Ouellette, the owner of Eli's, opened NoRA across the street from the tap room.

It was billed as a "new generation" bakery with a focus on artistic cupcakes and non-traditional recipes.

Eardley and Carella had developed a friendship, and so the young baker-to-be moved over to NoRA as well, beginning her employment working the front counter and progressing over the following years to a management role.

"I had no idea I would ever work somewhere as eclectic as NoRA," she said.

Carella had a passion for baking and much of her skillset was self-taught.

"I learned everything from Carrie," Eardley said. "She took me under her wing and showed me the ropes."

Eardley is now NoRA's bakery

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NoRA, which recently opened a second storefront in West Hartford in Blue Back Square, boasts more than 200 recipes that pair unexpected but delicious flavor combinations, unique fillings and colorful frostings.

"I collaborate with the baking team to create custom cupcakes. I do really enjoy all aspects of it. I love cake decorating. I've really fallen in love. ... I've learned a lot from the experiences I've had and just doing it myself. ... I've been surprised by my own skills. I've put a lot of focus into it."

–Kim Eardley

and catering director.

NoRA, which recently opened a second storefront in West Hartford in Blue Back Square, boasts more than 200 recipes that pair unexpected but delicious flavor combinations, unique fillings and colorful frostings.

Eardley's days are varied, encompassing everything from coordinating the cupcake packages for private events, consulting with customers for wedding, shower and birthday orders, and, of course, time in the bakery.

Baking goes on all day, every day, so NoRA can meet its wholesale requirements in addition to keeping the cases in the storefronts stocked.

"I collaborate with the baking team to create custom cupcakes," she said. "I do really enjoy all aspects of it. I love cake decorating. I've really fallen in love."

She has the most fun, she said, when creating new flavors.

"We are coming up with new ones all the time," she said, noting that the menus in the bakeries change daily.

"I've learned a lot from the experiences I've had and just doing it

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myself," she said. "We're always all learning from each other; always researching new ideas and techniques. I've been surprised by my own skills. I've put a lot of focus into it."

One of her favorite flavors is the Black Lavender Tea – Earl Grey tea cake filled with blackberry preserve with lavender herb buttercream and topped with a blackberry – but she has sweet spots for many of the flavors, including the Black and Blue, which is a chocolate cupcake with blackberries and blueberries, blueberry buttercream, chocolate ganache and basil chiffonade.

She also enjoys the Chocolate Peanut Butter Explosion, a chocolate cake with peanut butter filling, chocolate buttercream and Reese's peanut butter cups, and said one of the most popular savory flavors is the Fat Elvis, which is a banana cupcake, marshmallow fluff, peanut butter frosting and candied bacon.

NoRA's most popular cupcake is the Irish Car Bomb, a Guiness chocolate cupcake filled with Jameson dark chocolate ganache and topped with Bailey's Irish Cream cream cheese frosting and a malt ball.

"There is a flavor for everybody," she said.

Over the years, NoRA has also added selections of gluten free and vegan cupcakes.

"As we've gotten bigger over the years, we've seen an increase in the need," she said. "Whatever people need, we try to do it."

Dipped cupcakes are one of the more challenging things to make, she said, because there is a lot of "hurry up and wait" involved to be sure the shell sets correctly.

She also regularly reminds herself to think outside the box when it comes to developing new recipes.

"It can be a little more scientific," she said. "Sometimes you just have to let it sit and see how it cooks." **WHL**

We asked Kim some questions for more insight into her personality:

What is the most important tool in your kitchen?
"My pen. I constantly need to write something down. Whether it's an order sheet, baking list, recipe changes or a custom recipe."

If you could take one person out for a cupcake, who would it be?
"There is a cake artist in Australia who I love, Katherine Sabbath. She does amazing things in terms of flavor and design. I would love to pick her brain."

If you were a cupcake, what flavor would you be?
"Raspberry Lemonade. It's classic; it's from the original menu. It's sweet but has the lemonade flavor so there is a twist. That's how I am. When it comes time to crack the whip, I can do that. The candied lemon zest on top gives it extra pizazz. It's also purple, which is one of my favorite colors."

It's your last meal on earth: what cupcake is on your plate?
"The Venetian cupcake. It's an almond three-layer cake with apricot and raspberry filling dipped in chocolate ganache and rimmed in sugar. It's based on the Italian layer cookie. It's time consuming to make, but when we do make them everyone takes one home."

What is your best tip for at-home bakers?
"Make sure you have all the measuring tools you'll need. In the process of baking, measuring is very important."

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Writer's block

The Valentine's Day Rose Massacre in Blue Back Square

by Lynn Woike
Editor

The great rose mystery began on my first pass down Isham Road, looking for a parking space. As I crept along slowly, hoping someone was pulling out, I noticed a couple probably in their 20s standing by the street in front of Cheesecake Factory. Both were well dressed and laughing. The two details that stand out were the black shoes she was wearing – tall spike heels with thin straps that criss-crossed several times going up and around her ankles – and the fact she was awkwardly holding a very large bouquet of roses still in the florist's clear plastic as if she didn't know what to do with them.

Until that moment, I had forgotten it was Valentine's Day.

I continued around the block, past my old office, past my vet, getting a space on Memorial Drive. I wandered through a store before walking down Isham Road to toward lunch and a long-awaited pizza.

As I reached the area where the couple had been standing, I saw the huge bouquet sticking three-quarters of the way out of the trash receptacle. I touched them, and then almost immediately took them out of the trash, as if to save them from death by abandonment and freezing in the bitter cold.

As I was removing them, a woman was getting out of an SUV to also check them out. We tried to figure out how they ended up in the trash. I offered her some, but she declined and drove away.

The arrangement was heavy. Baby's breath and ferns were tucked in among the very long-stemmed red roses, each one fitted with a green plastic water tube. A large red bow held everything together. It wasn't one of those $10.99 bouquets sold out of a black SUV in a commuter parking lot.

They came to lunch with me, then rode in the car while I completed errands. Once home, I slipped off the bow and unwrapped the cellophane. There was no card.

As I began arranging what I thought was a dozen roses, I realized it was actually 32 roses. Now, a dozen is a common quantity. Even two dozen. But 32 is a number that hints at some other significance. Years of marriage? A birthday? Number of dates?

I found myself making up versions of the old poem.

"Roses are red. / Violets are blue. / Tell me why / You'd trash 32."

Red roses, with their romantic undertones, are the classic symbol of love, and remain the most popular way to celebrate love on the Hallmark holiday. Granted, red roses paired with baby's breath and ferns could be considered outdated, antiquated or old.

But was that a reason to trash them? Even if they were grown with carcinogenic pesticides and had an 8 percent chance of being cut by a child laborer in South America.

There was no indication that the well-dressed couple I saw laughing were the original giver and receiver. My guess is that, like me, one of them removed them from the trash receptacle, but unlike me, decided not to keep them.

The roses couldn't have been there very long, because the temperature was below freezing yet they appeared healthy – and three days later were open fully in glorious bloom.

I couldn't stop trying to figure out why they'd been thrown away.

I imagined a lot of sadness, anger, pain; maybe tears. I was sure it was a somebody done somebody wrong thing.

But who wronged whom?

Was there a fight?

Was the person receiving the roses a woman? Had the giver cheated on her? Had she cheated on him? Had someone done or said something offensive?

Or, had the giver had been stood up or otherwise rejected?

I couldn't stop myself. I wanted to know. My job requires me to ask lots of questions, so I called the high-profile florist whose sticker had held the cellophane together. I figured there couldn't have been that many large bouquets delivered that day, so someone might know something.

I explained where I found them and learned only that it had been a cash purchase. Each stem had cost $6.25, bringing the total to $200, plus tax.

I might be like Second Hand Rose who Barbara Streisand sang about in "Funny Girl," but I love the flowers all the same. I shared them with neighbors, put them in vases around my house and brought some to the office. I have even taken time to smell them.

While the mystery of how they came to be remains, perhaps there is no mystery of whom they were meant for: me. **WHL**

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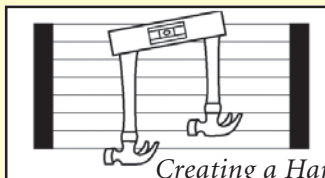

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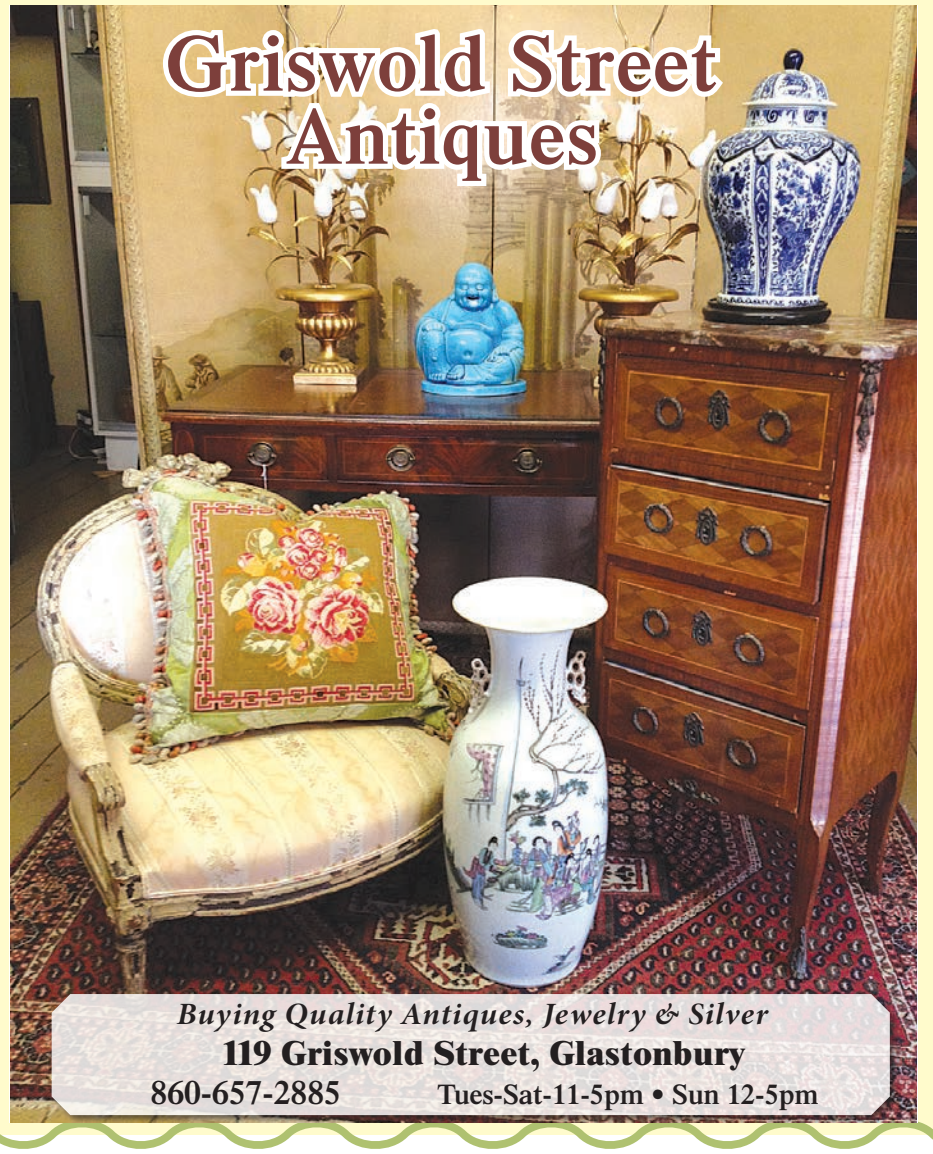

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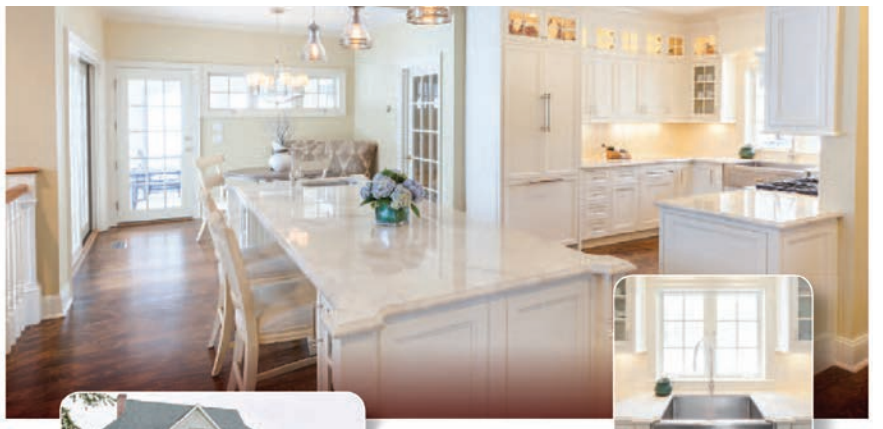

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Services

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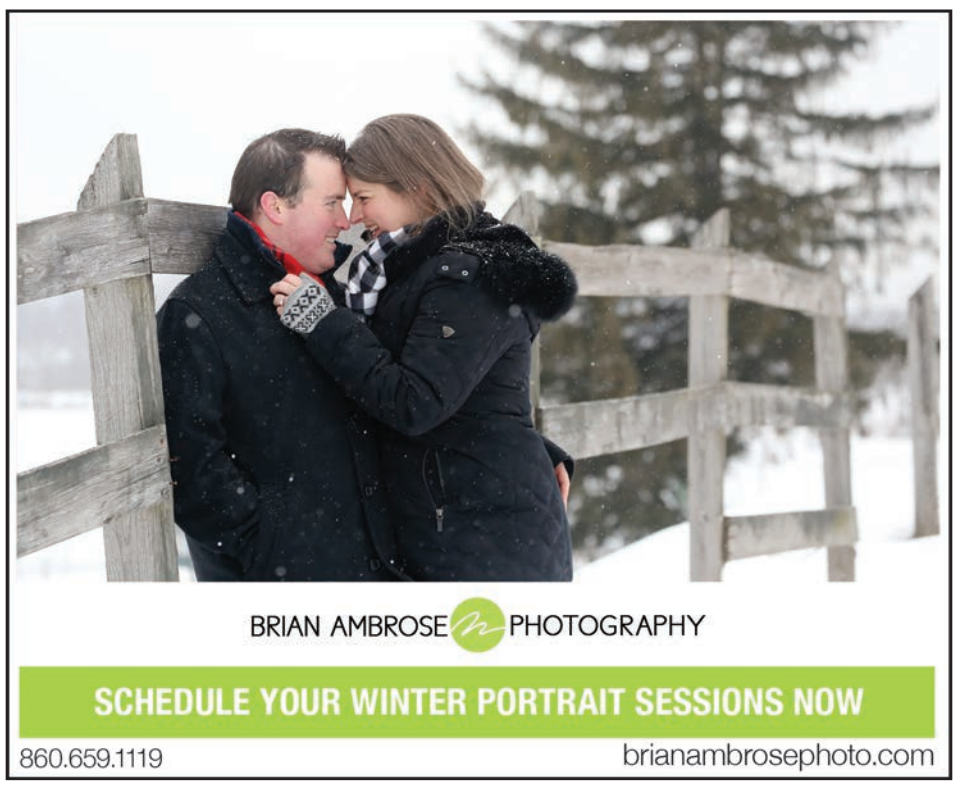
BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]

Spring Forward

After hitting rock bottom day-light-wise back on the Winter Solstice in December, we've been steadily gaining daylight (recently 2-3 min/day). We'll continue to do so as we head toward the summer solstice (June 20th). And this month, two important things happen pertaining to the sun:

(1) On Sunday, the 13th, Daylight Saving Time (DST) kicks off – officially at 2 a.m. This is when we set our clocks ahead one hour, to reallocate time from the morning to the afternoon. It's easiest to turn clocks ahead an hour before going to sleep Saturday; then on Sunday, the sun rises at 7:05 a.m. and sets at 6:56 p.m. It's also a good time to put fresh batteries in the smoke detectors!

(2) One week later, on the 20th, is the vernal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere – the official beginning of spring (at 12:30 a.m.). The term "equinox" is Latin, referring to the days of the year when there is equal day and equal night – when the Earth's axis is not tilting in either direction toward or away from the sun (also occurring in September with the transition from summer to autumn). However, the exact timing is more of an approximate - on the 20th we will actually have 12 hours and 10 minutes of possible daylight (sunrise 6:53 a.m., sunset 7:04 p.m.). **WHL**



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Seasons Restaurant

Easter Sunday Brunch

Join us and the Easter Bunny on Sunday March 27th for our traditional Easter Sunday Brunch Buffet from 11am-3pm

Full Menu Available Online

Reservations Required: 860.269.0242

Seasons Restaurant at **Avon Old Farms Hotel**
279 Avon Mountain Road • Avon, CT 06001
Restaurant: 860.269.0240 • Hotel: 860.677.1651
SeasonsRestaurantAvon.com • AvonOldFarmsHotel.com

Evergreens Restaurant

Easter Sunday Brunch Buffet

Seatings are available for Easter Brunch on Sunday March 27th at
10:30am • 12:00pm • 1:30pm • 3:00pm

Call 860-651-5700 for Details & Reservations

Full Menu Available Online

Arrive twenty minutes before the above listed seating times and join the *Easter Bunny* for an Easter Egg Hunt* on our Front Lawn

Evergreens Restaurant at **The Simsbury Inn**
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WEST HARTFORD – Amazing craftsmanship in this renovated colonial! Premier west of Mountain Rd setting. 4-5 BRs, open kitchen, spacious master suite, finished walk-out LL, 3-car garage & pool. Not to be missed! $839,900

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WEST HARTFORD – Sprawling historic home on quiet cul-de-sac. Remodeled cook's kitchen w/2 stoves, 2 dishwashers, double ovens & an adjacent pantry. 1st flr laundry & a glassed-in sunny office/sunroom. $679,900

Fran Landy 860.559.3098

HARTFORD – Circular drive leads to gracious mansion on historic Prospect Avenue! New kit w/gran/SS appls, frt-back foyer, 6BRs/4.1 baths, LR w/fpl & seasonal sunroom overlooking lovely gardens! $699,000

David Bobowski 860.543.2307

BURLINGTON – Stunning, custom built 5,500 Sq Ft, 5BR, 4.3BA, sits on 5+ acres w/1,300 Sq.Ft. attached 1st flr in law! Chefís kit, 4-car garage, Addl 1,000+ Sq. Ft in fully finished, heated LL & 20kw generator!$699,000

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WEST HARTFORD – Mechanically and structurally sound with gas fired furnace and newer thermal windows. Live the West Hartford lifestyle within minutes to top ranked public schools, WHC & Blue Back Square. $569,900

Merin-Horner Team 860.989.8882

WEST HARTFORD – 3,363 Sq Ft Ranch, 4 BR 3.5 BA. Gourmet Kitchen, granite SS appliances, master with spa bath, formal Din, large study w/FP. Hardwood, tile , oversized FR. Full Basement with 9' Ceilings. $559,900

Don Sagarino 860.836.8711

WEST HARTFORD – Immaculate 4BR, 2.1BA, 2927 sq ft colonial w/all the bells & whistles featuring 3 fireplaces, CAIR, 2 car garage, bright sunroom, finished LL, NEW gas furnace & gutters. $449,500

Joyce Aparicio 860.913.4231

WEST HARTFORD – Each room is generously sized w/hdwd flrs. The kit opens to a great seasonal room that would be ideal for a mudroom & laundry room. The home sits on a 1/2 acre over looking Wampanoag Country Club. $419,000

Kara Flanagan 860.796.5532

BURLINGTON – 4BR 3.5BA Col. Charming front porch, wide open floor plan w/beautiful stone fireplace. Lg windowed roomsm & EIK. Home has 4th BR over the garage. The backyard has a new patio area overlooking the brook. $410,000

Billie Reese 860.841.2457

WEST HARTFORD – $405,000 Updated kit features custom white cabinets, SS appliances, Carrera marble tile backsplash & granite countertops. Hdwd flrs throughout. Spacious master suite w/full bath. Large fenced-in backyard.

Tracey Hollerbach 860.305.7993

WEST HARTFORD – 4 BR, 2.5BA, 2 family rooms, brand new kitchen, remodeled baths, hardwood flrs. Directly across from Bugbee Elementary School. CAIR, deck overlooking gorgeous yard & setting w/ babbling brook. $389,900

Sherri Schwartz 860.883.0178

WEST HARTFORD – Great Location and Neighborhood, Amazing Space, Wonderful 1st Floor FR and LL partially finished off. Remodeled EIK w/granite and SS appliances. Master BR w/ full BA attached. Large Private Backyard. $389,000

Bille Reese 860.841.2457

WEST HARTFORD – Adorable 2/3 BR Cape Style home in the heart of Blue Back Square. Pleasant neutral interior décor, charming archways, wood flooring, new roof, replacement windows, attached 1 car garage, with handy breezeway leading to kitchen and more. True condo alternative. $265,000

Tracey Hollerbach 860.305.7993

WEST HARTFORD – Cute colonial with lots of updates. Formal LR with hardwood floors and fireplace. All season sun porch with heat and a/c. First floor laundry room. Newer composite deck that overlooks private yard. $299,900

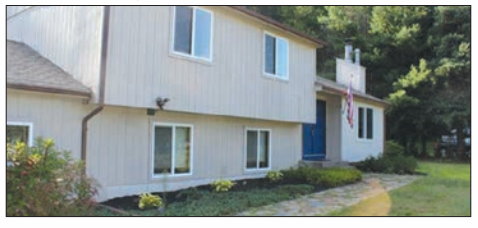
Sean Page 860.966.6761

WETHERSFIELD – Classic bungalow charm! 3 BR,2 BA w/hardwood floors, crown molding, master suite w/full BA, LR w/FP, formal DR. Newer roof, windows, siding & mechanicals, lovely landscaped yard & 1-car garage. $249,900

Michael Antisdale 860.803.6560

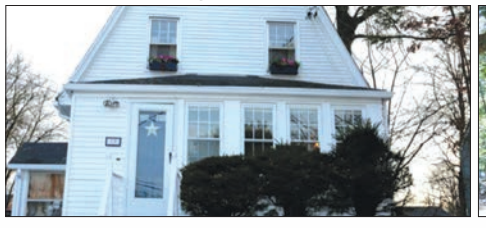
WEST HARTFORD – Open floor plan in this 4BR 2 full BA Cape Cod style home. Many improvements since 2009: entirely new 2nd floor boasting huge BA w/radiant heat flr, upstairs laundry, 2 ac/heat split systems.

Tracey Hollerbach 860.305.7993



BLOOMFIELD – $224,900 3BR , 2 BA split level on a quiet cul-de-sac. Huge great room, wood flrs, fireplace & serene view of the woods. New SS kitchen appliances, new gas furnace & 2-car attached gar. Lg sunny 1-acre yard.

Michael Antisdale 860.803.6560



WEST HARTFORD – Vintage 1923 bungalow. The wood flrs gleam & interior space is flooded w/natural light. The LR spills into the original front porch. The unique layout allows for a 1st floor or 2nd flr master. $204,900

Kara Flanagan 860.796.5532

FARMINGTON – 1BR/1BA Unit. Remodeled kitchen w/ granite, SS appliances. Updated full BA w/rain shower head and updated shower. Family Room with fireplace & Hardwood flrs. New Deck & new CAIR & Pool. $144,900

Mary Rose Sinatro 860-614-4566

BROOKLYN – Beautiful level lot in a quiet neighborhood all prepared! Approx 1 acre has been cleared, perced and a non-engineered septic system has been approved. Gravel driveway in place and an A-2 survey has been done.$59,900

Linda Bryne 860.481.9728

Sylvie Fillion, Mortgage Representative & Senior Loan Officer For Special Financing Opportuinties On Any Of Our Listings, Please Contact Sylvie at 860-570-2520 • NMLS #110720 & CT #5584

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